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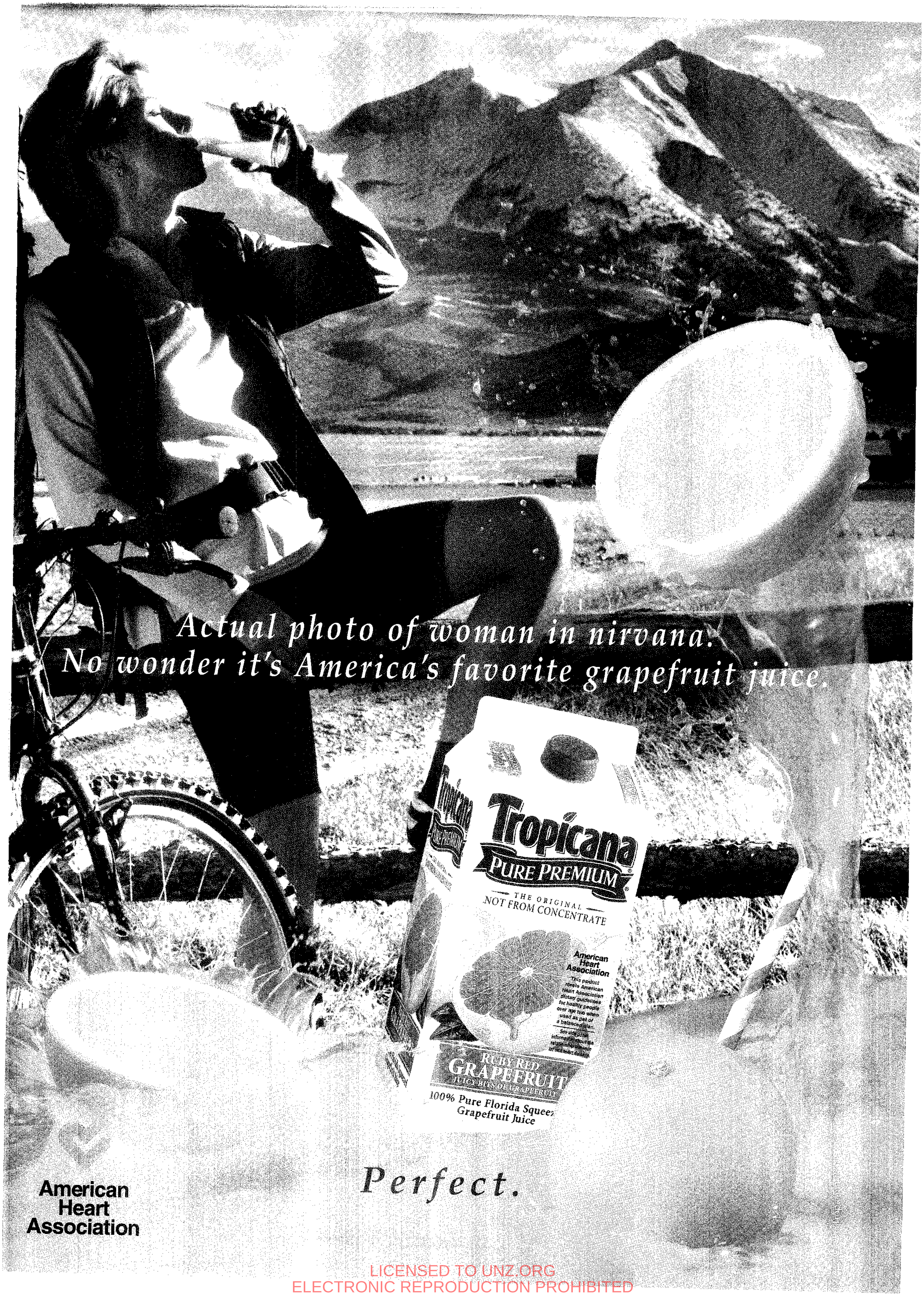
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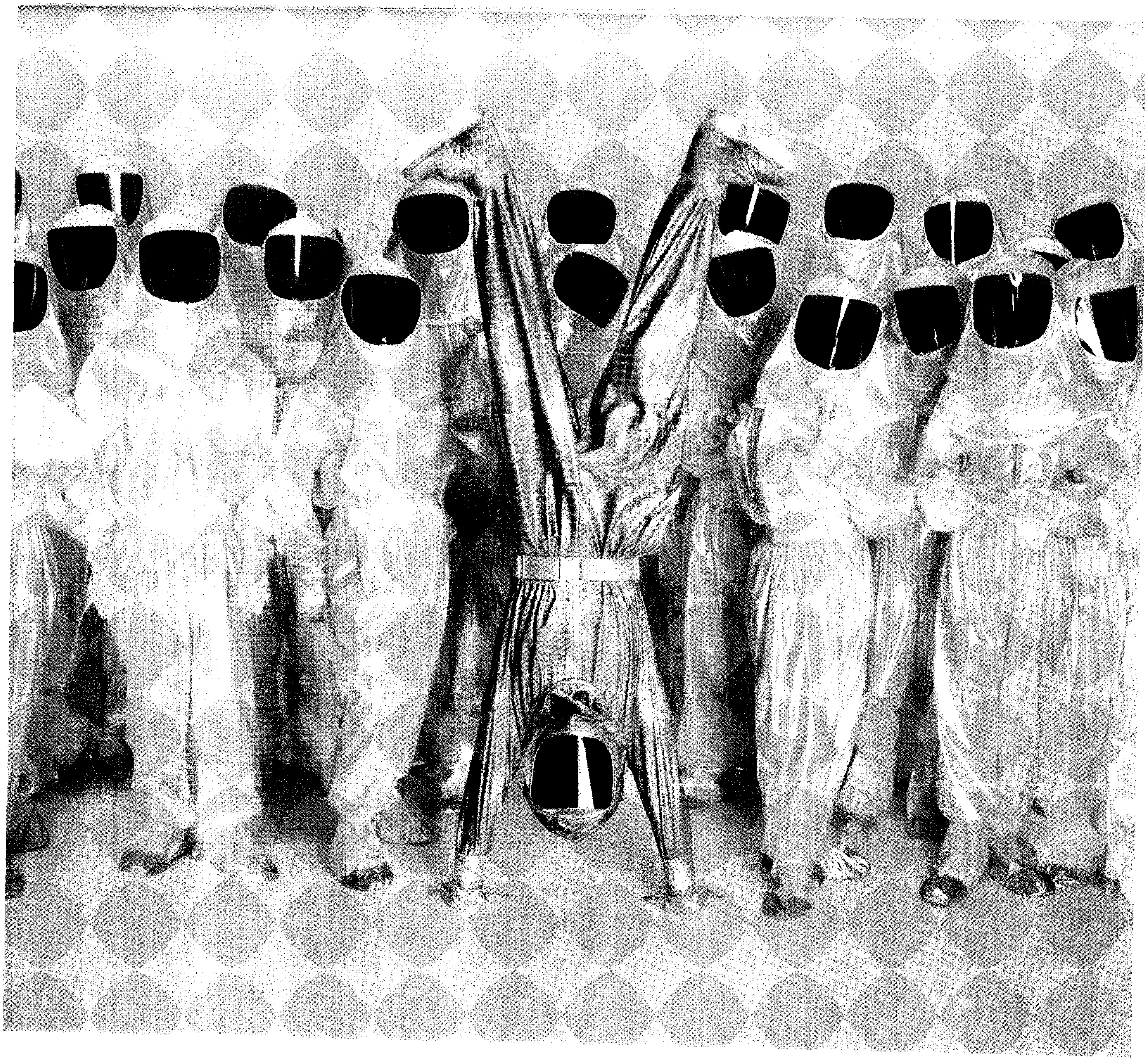

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COMMENT

THE ROARING NINETIES

Enjoy them while you can.

JOHN J. RASKOB is not a name that will echo down the ages, but he's worth at least a footnote in the history books. In an eventful life as a Wall Street investor, Raskob helped finance the Empire State Building, became a vice-president of General Motors, and ended up as chairman of the Democratic National Committee. Although he was a wealthy man, he wasn't puffed up about his good fortune; indeed, he was keen to spread it around, though not by giving it away. Instead, he sat down one day, put pen to paper, and composed an article for the *Ladies' Home Journal* with the splendid title "Everybody Ought to Be Rich." In it he told readers to invest fifteen dollars a month—that was the equivalent of about a hundred and thirty-five dollars in today's money—in something called an "equities security company." If the housewives of America followed this advice, Raskob assured them, they would end up like him—on easy street.

The article ran in the August, 1929, issue. Between September, 1929, and March, 1933, the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell by eighty per cent. Millions of investors were wiped out, and stock prices didn't reach their September, 1929, levels again until the mid-nineteen-fifties. In the light of these events, Raskob's reputation as an investment adviser suffered something of a setback. However, history does not proceed in a straight line, and it is clear that Raskob has been underrated. We can now agree that, far from being a fool or a charlatan, he was a visionary who was seventy years ahead of his time.

In 1996, according to figures released last week, Americans invested two hundred and twenty-two billion dollars in Raskob's "equity security companies"—or mutual funds, as they are now known. This figure was almost a hundred billion dollars above the previous record, which was set in 1993, and it represented a monthly investment in the stock market of about a hundred and eighty-five dollars for every household in the country—fifty dollars more than Raskob recommended. Nor does the public's appetite for stocks show any signs of waning. Federated Investments, Vanguard, and T. Rowe Price—three big mutual-fund companies—all reported last week that in January cash inflows into stock mutual funds were breaking all records.

The causes of this phenomenon are better understood than its results. For the past fifteen years, getting rich has appeared to be almost as easy as Raskob

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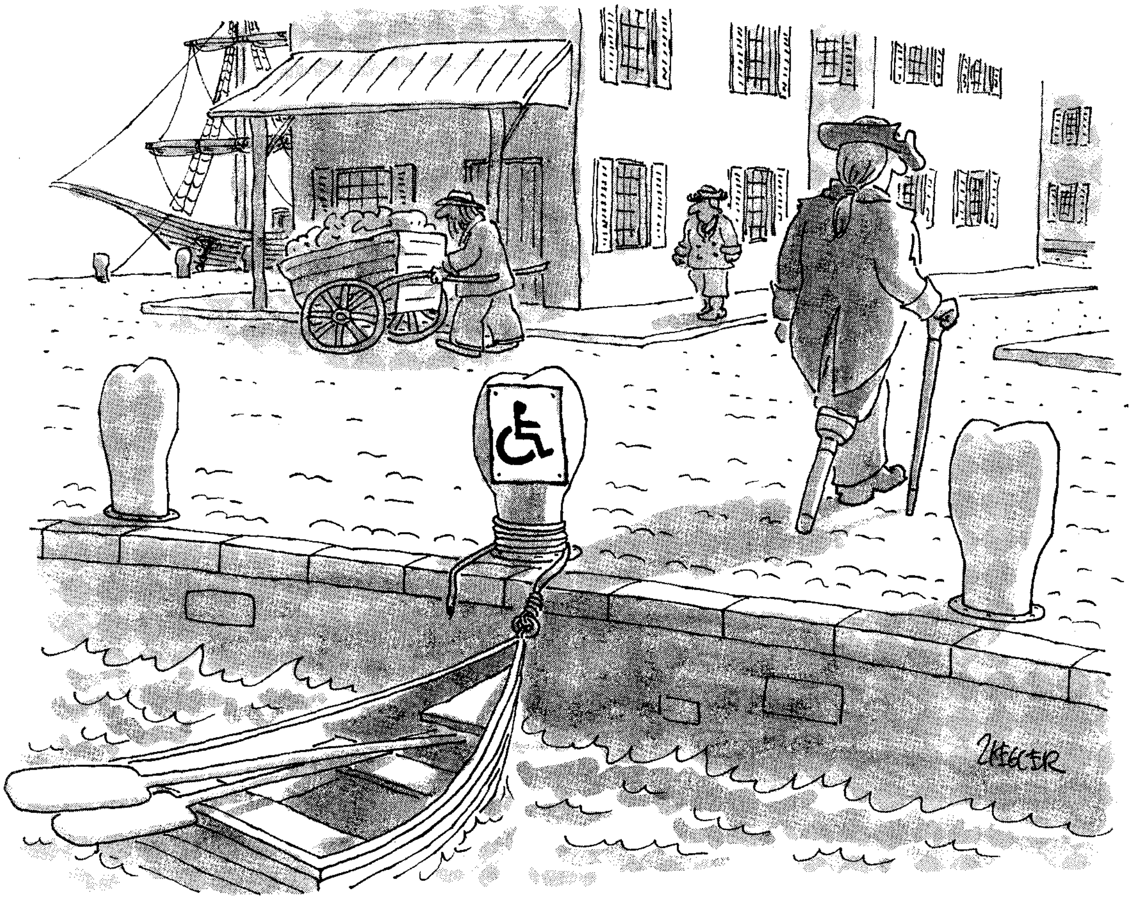
said it would be: the stock market has been enjoying its best period ever. If you had put fifty thousand dollars into a basket of stocks in January of 1982 and left it there, you'd now have almost a third of a million fructifying in your account; if you had reinvested the dividends, you'd have close to half a million. The only comparable decade and a half in this century was the period immediately before Raskob's article appeared, when the market rose by almost as much as it has risen since 1982. (Fifty thousand dollars invested at the end of 1914 would have grown to around two hundred and seventy-five thousand by September, 1929, exclusive of dividends.)

In the nineteen-eighties, prosperity based on rising financial markets created its own vocabulary ("yuppies," "dinks," "masters of the universe"), its own cults (of the M.B.A., of the C.E.O.), and its own popular culture ("The Bonfire of the Vanities," "Wall Street," "Family Ties"). A popular myth has it that this world perished on the third Monday of October, 1987, when the stock market tumbled. The fact is, though, that Black Monday was a mere hiccup. As the profit statements of the big financial firms which have been appearing in the business pages over the past few weeks attest, the eighties never ended. The securities industry earned about eleven and a half billion dollars last year—more than double what it made in its best year during the fabled Decade of Greed. One investment bank alone, Goldman Sachs, made a profit of $2.61 billion in 1996—a figure that translates into almost three hundred thousand dollars per employee. Most of this sum went to the firm's two hundred partners, who are reputed to have received bonuses of between five million and twenty-five million dollars each. Given these numbers, it is hardly surprising that the *Times* reported recently, "Hermès has a waiting list for its $4,000 Kelly bags. Neiman Marcus sold all 50 of the $75,000 Jaguars featured in its Christmas catalogue in eight days. Patek Philippe has back orders for a $44,500 watch."

The three-and-a-half-trillion-dollar question—that's the total amount now invested in mutual funds—is how long Wall Street's alchemy machine can keep humming along. Alas, there's no telling. Mention of the Great Crash is considered impolite in some circles, but it illustrates that in the stock market there is no such thing as intrinsic value, just good timing and bad timing. Raskob's advice wasn't stupid; it was just tardy (or premature). Similarly, the small band of Wall Street bears who emerged last year weren't necessarily mistaken; they may have just been early, although, as one of them—Byron Wien, of Morgan Stanley—said recently, "in this business, there is very little difference between being early and being wrong."

What can be stated with confidence is that stock prices look dizzyingly high. Indeed, the signs that we are witnessing a speculative stampede are unmistakable. Fifteen years ago, just seven million Americans owned mutual funds. Now the figure is sixty-three million. In the early nineteen-eighties, investors balked at paying prices equal to about eight times companies' earnings; last week they were falling all over each other to pay more than twenty times earnings for the same stocks. While American companies have become more profitable, their share prices have risen a lot more than their profits.

Indeed, recent experience in the stock market appears to contradict the Law of Demand, which holds that demand falls when prices increase. Speculative markets, however, are not governed by abstract principles. They are governed by crowd psychology. As usual, the relevant authority is Keynes, who likened investing to picking the winner of a beauty contest, where the key to success is knowing the tastes of the other judges, not analyzing the actual merits of each contestant. At the moment, blondes are all the rage, so Miss Sweden appears to be a sure thing. Next month, or next year, brunettes may be back in style, in which case shares in Nordic milkmaids won't be worth a table napkin at Harry's Bar. Meanwhile, until the bubble bursts, it will pay to follow Raskob's advice—or, better still, to land a job at Goldman Sachs. —JOHN CASSIDY



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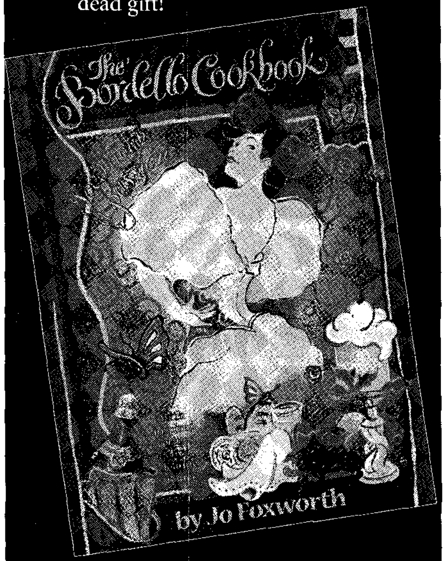

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THE MAIL

POT SHOTS

Hendrik Hertzberg's suggestion that the successful medical-marijuana initiative in California originated in a protest against hypocritical baby-boomer politicians (Comment, "The Pot Perplex," January 6th) overlooks the fact that voters here decided they were quite able to identify legitimate medical use of marijuana. Both the trend toward increasingly stringent managed care and the medical élite's longtime lethargy in exploring anything nontraditional pushed California voters to demonstrate that they want serious patient care to remain separated from the nation's drug policies.

JOSEPH TURK
Monterey, Calif.

From the work that Phoenix House has been doing throughout the country for the last thirty years, we have learned that marijuana is far from the benign substance that pot apologists make it out to be—that not only is it responsible for a high adolescent-casualty rate (fully forty per cent of the deeply troubled teens in treatment at most of our residential high schools have used nothing more potent than pot), but it is a "gateway" drug that makes subsequent use of more potent and disabling substances infinitely more likely. Thus, the real issue about medical marijuana is not, as Mr. Hertzberg would have it, whether "hard-liners" seek to deny suffering patients the relief marijuana would bring them. It is whether such benefits exist and, if they do, whether they are so great that they justify putting significantly more adolescents in harm's way.

At the moment, there is no scientific evidence that smoking marijuana is of any greater benefit to patients with cancer, glaucoma, AIDS, or multiple sclerosis than the treatments they are now offered. No one wants to deny safe and effective medication to patients in distress. The California and Arizona initiatives highlight the need for more research. If marijuana has unique therapeutic properties, physicians should be free to prescribe it for specific, appropriate uses. But that is a far cry from making it legal for anyone, of any age, who can get a physician's approval, to buy, grow, or smoke marijuana.

MITCHELL S. ROSENTHAL, M.D.
President, Phoenix House Foundation
New York City

THE POLITICS OF OBSESSION

I'm engaged in writing Arthur Koestler's biography, and to me Bernard Avishai's account of Koestler's love life, his marriage to Cynthia Jefferies, their joint suicide, and the significance of the last for our understanding of Koestler ("The Dangers of Devotion," January 6th) seems to cast more darkness than light on the subject. What bound Koestler and his wife together was an almost perfect match between his misogyny and her masochism. It is almost certainly true that he did not talk her into early suicide and would not have wished to. But he did not need to. They had jointly created a relationship of such deep dependency that her decision to commit suicide when he did was perfectly logical. Koestler's leukemia, however, was not terminal. To call it that obscures the fact that his suicide was an assertion of control over death—a control he had never been able to exert over his life. Paradoxically, Cynthia, in her devotion, frustrated Koestler's symbolic intentions by creating a mystery that distracted attention from the meaning of his act. In death she overshadowed him as she had never been able to do while she was alive.

Koestler was well aware of his emotional deficiencies and devoted some of the best pages of his autobiographies to analyzing them, but I very much doubt whether these inadequacies "make a mockery" of Koestler's work, as Avishai maintains. The autobiographies, the penetrating political essays, and the bold scientific speculations are as much manifestations of his rich and tortured personality as are his turbulent life and controversial death.

MICHAEL SCAMMELL
New York City

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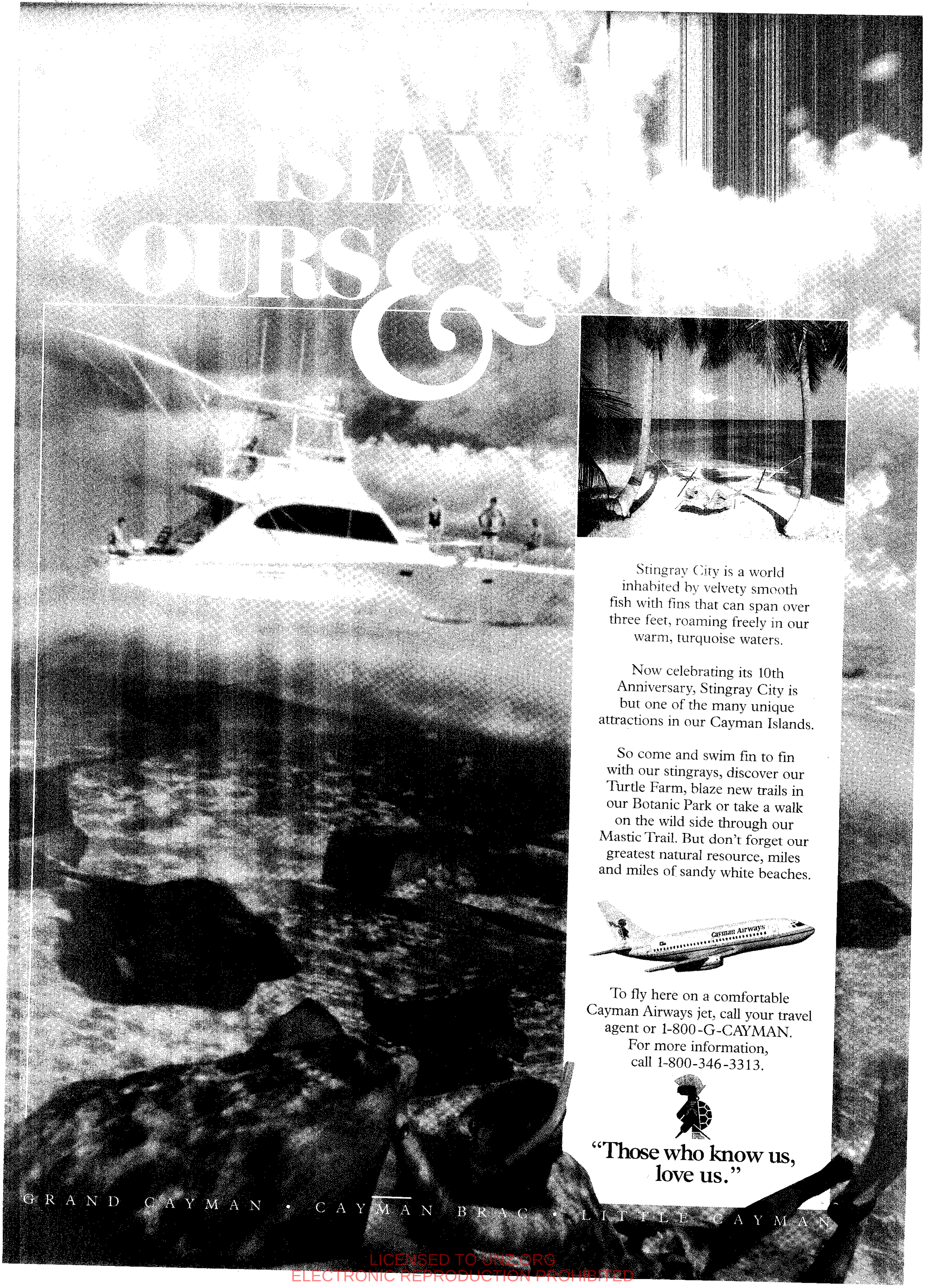

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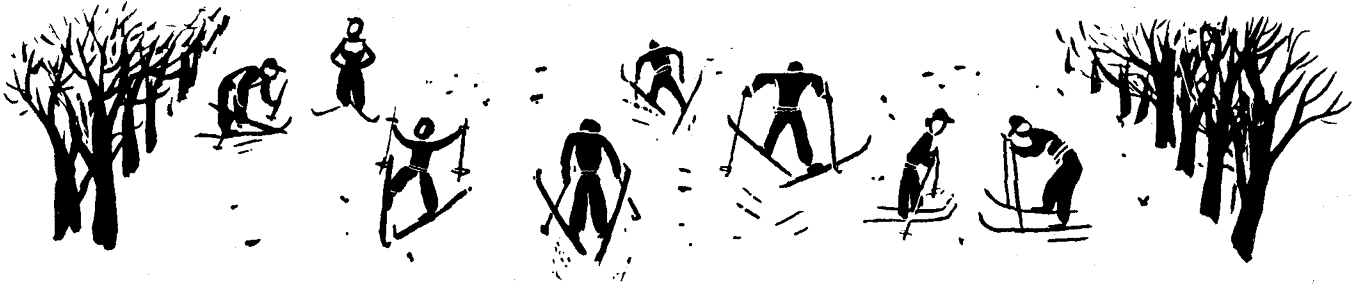

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Boychik—A comedy-drama by Richard Krevolin, starring Richard Kline as a middle-aged Jewish man dealing with the death of his father. Two previews on Feb. 5. Opens Feb. 6 at 7. (Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200.)

Dreamstuff—A new musical based on the Aladdin tale but updated to the nineteen-nineties. In previews. (Samuel Beckett, 412 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.)

The Flatted Fifth—From the New Group, a new play by Seth Zvi Rosenfeld about multicultural relationships. With Danny Hoch, Sarita Choudhury, and Nicole Parker. Directed by Jo Bonney. In previews through Feb. 9. Opens Feb. 10 at 8. (INTAR, 420 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

A Huey P. Newton Story—Roger Guenveur Smith's solo portrait of the co-founder of the Black Panthers. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

Hysterical Blindness—Jared Harris is the director of Laura Cahill's new play, which revolves around the lives of two blue-collar New Jersey women. Previews Feb. 7-10. Opens Feb. 11 at 8:30 and continues through March 2. ('A' Theatre, 154 W. 29th St. 995-8949.)

In-Betweens—A prostitute, a transvestite, and a couple of ex-cons make up the cast of characters in a darkly comic love story by Bryan Goluboff, set in the Bronx. In previews. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 989-2020.)

The Little Frieda Mysteries—The Talent Family (the brother-and-sister writing team of David and Amy Sedaris) returns to La Mama with a new comedy, starring Ms. Sedaris, David Rakoff, Penny Boyer, and Chuck Coggins. Previews Feb. 6-8. Opens Feb. 10 at 8. (74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

Peter and Wendy—The experimental theatre troupe Mabou Mines' interpretation of J. M. Barrie's tale about the boy who wouldn't grow up and the girl who loved him features Bunraku puppets and Celtic music. Directed by Lee Breuer. Preview on Feb. 5. Opens Feb. 6 at 7. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

Psychopathia Sexualis—John Patrick Shanley's new comedy, about a man with a fetish, stars Daniel Jerroll. Daniel Sullivan is the director. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

A Question of Mercy—A 1991 essay on doctor-assisted suicide published in the *Times Magazine* inspired this work by David Rabe. Douglas Hughes directs; Veanne Cox and Stephen Spinella are in the cast. Previews begin Feb. 7. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

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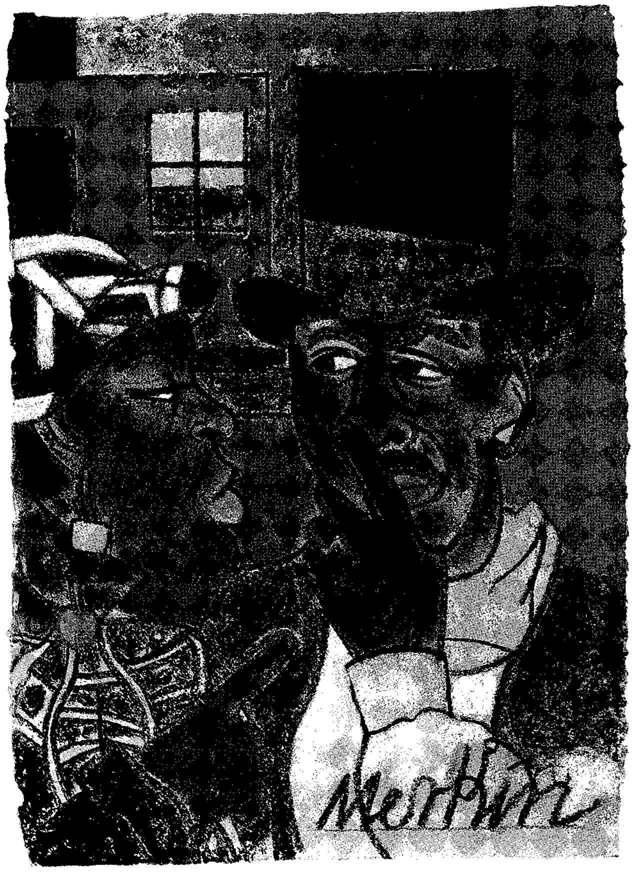
9	10	11				

Robbers—Michael Rapaport stars in Lyle Kessler's comedy, directed by Marshall W. Mason, in which a cannery hires an undercover agent to flush out thieving employees. Previews begin Feb. 7. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

Signature Theatre Company—The Sam Shepard season continues with three one-acts directed by Darrell Larson: "The Sad Lament of Pecos Bill on the Eve of Killing His Wife," "Killer's Head," and "Action." In previews through Feb. 8. Opens Feb. 9 at 3. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

Stanley—From London's Royal National Theatre comes Pam Gems's latest biographical play, starring Antony Sher as the English painter Stanley Spencer. Directed by John Caird. In previews. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

Stonewall Jackson's House—Jonathan Reynolds's comedy, set in the present, about a woman who pushes the racial envelope. In previews. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 840-3074.)



Ebony Jo-Ann and Glynn Turman, in the New Federal Theatre's revival of "Do Lord Remember Me."

RICHARD MERKIN

Three Sisters—Amy Irving, Lili Taylor, and Jeanne Tripplehorn are Chekhov's despairing, hopeful trio and Billy Crudup, Eric Stoltz, and David Strathairn their suitors, in a Roundabout Theatre staging directed by Scott Elliott. In previews. (Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Chicago—Walter Bobbie's bookless, setless revival of the 1975 Kander-Ebb-Fosse extravaganza of cynicism (choreographed this time around by Ann Reinking, who co-stars with Bebe Neuwirth) has enough razzle-dazzle and flashes of lucid sarcasm to set the audience cheering almost from the start. The story is about a woman who gets away with murder; this pared-down concert posing as a full-dress musical may do the same. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/25/96.) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100. The play closes here on Feb. 9. It moves to the Shubert Theatre on Feb. 12.)

Do Lord Remember Me—A New Federal Theatre revival of James de Jongh's 1977 play, which he based on W.P.A. interviews with freed slaves, skillfully interweaving their words with snatches of gospel (powerfully sung here) and a visit from Nat Turner. Because the ensemble cast of five, with Barbara Montgomery at the emotional core, is so utterly convincing, the drama doesn't play as a mere polemic, and it isn't consumed by pain: it has some very funny scenes and a few moments of pure joy. Cleanly directed by Regge Life. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Closes Feb. 16.)

Forbidden Broadway Strikes Back!—Gerard Alessandrini cuts a satirical swath through the Great White Way in the latest edition of his musical parody. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

Full Gallop—The legendary, vividly eccentric fashion editor Diana Vreeland is the subject of Mary Louise Wilson and Mark Hampton's one-woman play, in which Wilson stars. Set in 1971, shortly after Vreeland was fired from *Vogue*, it's rich and resonant—very funny and very moving. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Joseph Gabriel: Magic on Broadway—Mr. Gabriel has performed at the Las Vegas Flamingo Hilton for the past ten years, and his feats are certainly impressive, but it's all too clear from the trappings of his act—dancers in polka-dotted boxer shorts, a sequinned Elvis—that he hasn't left Nevada behind. (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Late Nite Catechism—Maripat Donovan offers a commandingly funny performance as the lone nun in charge of an adult catechism class, and the audience brings as much to the performance as the script does. (St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

Marking—The actor Patrick Breen's first full-length play is about several young couples connected by friendship and infidelity, by funny coincidence and fateful consequence. It has its longueurs, but it also has

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What A Luxury Car Should Be

an exceptional cast that brings out the most in Breen's intelligent script. Elizabeth Gottlieb directed. (Judith Anderson, 422 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes Feb. 9.)

Minutes from the Blue Route—*Elizabeth Franz,* Catherine Kellner, Matt McGrath, and Stephen Mendillo star in Tom Donaghy's family drama, directed by David Warren. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

Mock Trial—Romulus Linney directs Theatre for the New City's production of his drama. (155 First Ave., at 10th St. 254-1109. Closes Feb. 9.)

My Astonishing Self—*Donal Donnelly impersonates* George Bernard Shaw, in a one-man show created by Michael Voysey from the playwright's letters, diaries, speeches, and other writings. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

Neat—Charlayne Woodard's one-woman show is about growing up black in the sixties and about her relationship with her aunt Beneatha—called Neat by her family—who suffered brain damage as an infant and remained childlike as she grew older. The show is a mixed bag: Woodard's depictions of older relatives are lovingly observant, but her portrayal of herself as a child is unbearably cute and false. Directed by Tazewell Thompson. (1/27/97) (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes Feb. 9.)

Old Wicked Songs—Jon Marans' well-written piece of sentimental sanctimony asks the question: Can a blocked, arrogant twenty-five-year-old pianist (Justin Kirk) find wisdom under the tutelage of a suicidal singing teacher (Hal Robinson) who survived the Holocaust? (The answer is yes.) (9/16/96) (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

Once Upon a Mattress—Gerald Gutierrez's revival of Mary Rodgers's 1959 musical, based on Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Princess and the Pea," has topnotch production values but very little reason for being, unless you have a fondness for dumb, Eisenhower-era sex jokes and marshmallowy melodies. That modern madcap Sarah Jessica Parker shines as the princess, but she deserves a vehicle that, to paraphrase Jerome Kern, is not merely lovely to look at but delightful to know. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Permanent Brain Damage—Richard Foreman and his Ontological-Hysteric Theatre's latest attempt to stop making sense is, strictly speaking, successful, but this new work is jarringly assaultive rather than jarringly provocative. Still, there's nothing like its surpassing, indescribable strangeness to be found in any other theatre, and it will knock some of the dust off your brain. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

Present Laughter—As the monumentally egotistical West End star Garry Essendine, Frank Langella keeps the core of Noël Coward's 1939 comedy of bad manners alive with a full-tilt assault on the character's outrageousness. Unfortunately, the director, Scott Elliott, seems to think that he's liberating Coward by turning the play into a bisexual romp. But he orchestrates some delicious farce moments, and the supporting players are funny even when Elliott is leading them down blind alleys. (11/25/96) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Scapin—Bill Irwin's production (he has the title role, he directed, and, with the playwright Mark O'Donnell, he adapted the script) of Molière's comedy is a perfect blend of sweetness and anarchy. In cartoon terms, it's Disney meets Warner Bros.: there's no doubt that a certain *lapin* named Bugs Bunny has left his pawprints here. Some of the casting is questionable, but Christopher Evan Welch, who is making his New York début, raises only the question "When will we see him again?" He's sensational: game, rubbery, and hilarious, and every bit Irwin's clownish equal. (1/27/97) (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

Second-Hand Smoke—Mac Wellman apparently comes out of the School of Huh?: he loves playing with language, but in his new work, set in an end-of-the-millennium town populated by people who speak poetic gibberish, all play has made Mac a dull boy. The more he ruminates (on the conditional nature of words, the dangers of miscommunication, etc.), the less he illuminates. The few truly funny moments that he gives his excellent cast—which includes David Greenspan, Kristine Nielsen, and Joanna P. Adler—leave you wishing for more levity throughout. Richard Caliban is the director; Kyle Chepulis designed the ingenious set. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052. Closes Feb. 9.)

The Steward of Christendom—A majestic work by Sebastian Barry—as powerful an Irish play as has been written in the last decade—with a bravura performance by Donal McCann which explores how one loyal servant to the Crown is betrayed by the tides of history and change. It's set in 1932 in a County Wicklow nursing home, and its title character is based on Barry's great-grandfather, who was the last chief superintendent of the Dublin Metropolitan Police. Presented by the Brooklyn Academy of Music, under the direction of Max Stafford-Clark. (Majestic, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

Venice Preserv'd—The Pearl Theatre Company offers Thomas Otway's Restoration tragedy. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

You Say What I Mean But What You Mean Is Not What I Said—Five performers sing (nonsense syllables as well as recognizable words) and dance (sometimes onstage, sometimes on tables in the audience), in an overwhelming display of virtuosity and raw emotion which rarely makes rational sense and yet is often beautiful and occasionally quite moving. Grisha Coleman conceived, composed, and is one of the performers in this Hot Mouth production, presented by the Foundry Theatre. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 777-1441. Closes Feb. 9.)

LONG RUNS

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **BRING IN DA NOISE, BRING IN DA FUNK:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **GRANDMA SYLVIA'S FUNERAL:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555. . . . **GREASE!:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. (Closes Feb. 23.) . . . **HOWARD CRABTREE'S WHEN PIGS FLY:** Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **THE KING AND I:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100. . . . **MASTER CLASS:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **SUNSET BOULEVARD:** Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4007. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200. . . . **VICTOR/VICTORIA:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

DANCE

New York City Ballet—Feb. 5 at 8: "Who Cares?," "Red Angels," "Tarantella," and "Fancy Free." . . . ¶ Feb. 6 at 8: "Apollo," "Fearful Symmetries," and "I'm Old Fashioned." . . . ¶ Feb. 7 at 8: "Coppélia." . . . ¶ Feb. 8 at 2: "Fearful Symmetries," "Moves," and "Western Symphony." . . . ¶ Feb. 8 at 8: "Mozartiana," "Fearful Symmetries," and "I'm Old Fashioned." . . . ¶ Feb. 9 at 3: "Apollo," "A Schubertiad," and "Who Cares?" . . . ¶ Feb. 11 at 8: "Coppélia." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. The season continues through March 2.)

American Repertory Ballet—The resident company to be of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, in Newark, presents a selection of interstate repertory, including Philip Jerry's "Our Town," Kevin O'Day's "End Title," and artistic director Septime Webre's "Fluctuating Hemlines." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Feb. 4-7 at 8, Feb. 8 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 9 at 2 and 7:30.)

"Three's the One"—Hank Smith is a choreographer, tap dancer, and clown who lists Samuel Beckett, Japanese theatre, and "Sesame Street" among his influences. His collaborators this season are similarly well rounded: Cynthia Oliver acts and dances, composer David Pleasant plays his body like a percussion set. Their new work—"a combination jam session and ritual," according to Smith—explores differences between black American cultures (for instance, ways that Gullah songs and dances differ from Trinidadian ones) as well as sources of unity. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Feb. 6-9 at 7:30. Through Feb. 16.)

"Three's the One," at P.S. 122.

ROXANNA BIKADOROFF

"Spiritual Survival in a War Zone"—*Choreographer* Kwame A. Ross and the Sands of Time Theatrical Dance Company follow the lives and hard times of three homeless women—one white, one black, and one Asian-American. (Danspace, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Feb. 6-9 at 8:30.)

Martha at Mother—The monthly night-club performance series, hosted by Martha Graham soundalike Richard Move, offers a tasting menu of delectable dance: Neil Greenberg, Sean Curran, and Koosil-Ja Hwang perform solos, and acrobatic performers Lisa Dalton (of Elizabeth Streb/Ringside) and Austin Hartel (formerly of Pilobolus) join forces for "Hegira." (432 W. 14th St., at Washington St. 366-5680. Feb. 5 at 9.)

"After Sorrow"—Director Ping Chong completes his East/West trilogy in a collaboration with choreographer Muna Tseng and composer Josef Fung. This installment consists of four solos by Tseng: "L'Histoire Chinoise," "The Whisper of Stone," "98.6: A Convergence in 15 Minutes," and the title work, a portrait of contemporary Vietnam. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710. Feb. 5-8 at 7:30 and Feb. 9 at 3 and 7:30. Through Feb. 15.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

Billy Taylor Trio with Bill Watrous—Taylor's piano work mirrors his persona, which is sturdy, erudite, and resolutely mainstream. The epiphanies may be few, but quality is a given. He and his sidemen are joined by Watrous, a magician of a trombonist who's lost none of the hoop-jumping virtuosity that set him apart in the seventies. Part of the Jazz Models & Mentors series. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Feb. 6 at 7.)

Pavement—In an era of corporate facelessness and derivative, disposable ennui, this four-piece Stockton, California, band has distinguished itself with music that's original, accessible, and archly self-conscious. One part Nirvana, one part Steven Wright, it specializes in jagged arrangements, self-flagellating lyrics, and guitars that sound as if they were recorded over vacuum cleaners. The band's forthcoming release, "Brighten the Corners," is a minor masterpiece. (Loeb Student Center Auditorium, New York University, Washington Sq. and LaGuardia Pl. 998-4949. Feb. 6 at 7:30. . . . ¶ Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 741-0391. Feb. 8 at 8.)

"Highlights in Jazz"—A concert so all-over-the-map that you may need a compass to follow it, this extravaganza also has the potential to be one of the year's most pleasing jazz galas. Dave Frishberg is a truly clever songwriter who knows his way around the piano; so does the young virtuoso Cyrus Chestnut, who will bring his trio. Warren Vache is the king of neo-swing trumpet, and Joe Puma has forgotten more about bop guitar than most people will ever learn. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 346-1715. Feb. 6 at 8.)

Randy Weston Quintet—Weston has steeped himself in the music of North Africa, but there's still plenty of Brooklyn bop left in his piano; combining the jagged tonalities of Thelonious Monk, the fragrant harmonies of Duke Ellington, and the nasty rhythms of Bud Powell, he has a musical personality as urban as the M.T.A. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. For information, call 556-3865. Feb. 9 at 7:30.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—The impudent goofiness of guitarist and vocalist **JOHN PIZZARELLI** brings a fresh breeze to the stuffy old Oak Room through Feb. 8. Dining.

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—The legendary club has a new address and bigger digs. Through Feb. 9: The **MICHAEL BRECKER** quintet. Saxophonist Brecker certainly isn't scared that others will steal his thunder. He's joined here by guitarist **PAT METHENY,** bassist **DAVE HOLLAND,** drummer **JACK DE JOHNETTE,** and pianist **JOEY CALDERAZZO:** the kind of rhythm section that Berklee students dream about. The ultra-adept Brecker has his devotees, and they'll be out in force. Feb. 10: The **TOSHIKO AKIYOSHI** jazz orchestra. Feb. 11-12: The **WALTER BISHOP** trio. Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Jazz, mirrors, and a gift shop. Through Feb. 9: The **ZAWINUL SYNDICATE.** Keyboardist Joe Zawinul, the mastermind behind Weather Report, is still a fusion man, only now he's fusing jazz, funk, and world music. He's nothing if not expansive, and his big-picture ambition is always worth celebrating. With the **YELLOWJACKETS.** Starting Feb. 11: Saxophonist **JOE LOVANO** plays music associated with Frank Sinatra. Dining.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through late March, the amazing **EARTHA KITT.** She is still a fierce and funny performer with a feral grip on her audience. At the end of a song she'll throw back her head and laugh, like some kind of carnivore after the kill; she chooses her victims from the front row, and when the show is over there's blood on the tables. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, pianist **PETER MINTUN** is in charge. A genuine throwback to a gentler time, this elegant performer specializes in curios from the twenties and thirties. Agreeable and reassuring without being over-gracious, he's sort of a curio himself.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Feb. 9: The **STEPHEN SCOTT** quintet. It's heartening that the best tracks on Scott's new disk, "The Beautiful Thing," are the uncluttered trio performances, which highlight his sturdy and inventive piano playing. He can head down strange, introverted paths now and again, but at least he follows a genuine muse. Starting Feb. 11: The **TERENCE BLANCHARD/DONALD HARRISON** quintet. Dining.

Knickerbocker, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—Pianist **BILL CHARLAP** and bassist **SEAN SMITH** (Feb. 5-8) are two gifted, resolutely thoughtful New York players infatuated with lyricism and musicality. The flavor du jour they may not be, but their elegance and discernment have a cleansing effect on the palate.

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—A plush, old-fashioned night club, sixty-five floors above it all, complete with Art Deco fixtures, intimate glitter, and a panoramic view as dizzying as the tab. At the start of his career, in the postwar forties and fifties, **VIC DAMONE** (in through February) embodied the placid opulence of the era: he was polite and handsome, and his voice was as smooth and lustrous as silk taffeta (and just as stiff). He doesn't swing, but his phrasing is conversational, as are his wonderful stories about growing up in Bensonhurst—and the voice itself is still something to marvel at. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in the Rainbow Room, there's a revolving dance floor, plus swinging big-band music courtesy of the Rainbow Room Orchestra, featuring vocalists Sean Mahony and Claudette Sierra. Closed Mondays.

GIAMBATTISTA
TIEPOLO

Through April 27

The brilliance of Giambattista Tiepolo is revealed in this first American retrospective of the 18th-century master. More than 100 works, including monumental canvases, oil sketches, altarpieces, and prints are gathered from the finest collections around the world to celebrate the 300th anniversary of Tiepolo's birth.

The exhibition is made possible in part by the Italian Trade Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts.

THE METROPOLITAN
MUSEUM OF ART

Open Friday and Saturday evenings until 9 p.m.
Fifth Avenue at 82nd Street, New York

Giambattista Tiepolo, *Rinaldo and Armida in the Garden* (detail), ca. 1742–45. The

Smalls, 183 W. 10th St. (929-7565)—This aptly named club features up-and-coming players jamming late into the night. Feb. 6: The **MYRON WALDEN** quartet. Walden is part of the fresh crop of alto saxophonists which has seemingly sprouted overnight. Like Steve Wilson and Sherwin Irby, he's a rousing talent worth keeping your eye on. Feb. 7-8: The **JAY COLLINS** quartet. Stocked to the gills with exciting new players, the **JASON LINDNER BIG BAND** now holds court every Monday.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—A convivial and crowded jazz club where the musicians are always top-shelf. Through Feb. 9: The **CARLOS WARD** group. One of the added bonuses of catching Don Cherry or Abdullah Ibrahim over the past decade was hearing the eminently soulful alto saxophone and honeyed flute of their trusted sideman Ward. An impassioned up-tempo improviser—he was a handpicked guest at late-era John Coltrane shows—Ward is most transcendent when coating a ballad in lush, gospel-soaked tones, transforming himself into an avant reincarnation of Johnny Hodges. Starting Feb. 11: The **GARY BARTZ** quartet. Dining.

Village Gate, 240 W. 52nd St. (307-5252)—Through Feb. 8: The **RANDY SANDKE** quartet. From Feb. 11: The **BOB KINDRED** quartet. Dining.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Feb. 9: The **BOBBY HUTCHERSON** quartet. It took Hutcherson to translate the modernist grammar of sixties jazz for the vibraphone. He's at his best when he glides into the spare, mysterious ruminations perfected in his work on Eric Dolphy's classic "Out to Lunch." Hutcherson also loves to strut his pistonlike technique on up-tempo numbers. Starting Feb. 11: The **LARRY SMITH** quartet. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** still holds sway on Mondays.

Visiones, 125 Macdougal St., at W. 3rd St. (673-5576)—Feb. 5-8: The **MICHAEL WOLFF** quartet. As musical director of Arsenio Hall's defunct show, pianist Wolff would set the grooves, keep the audience pumped, and laugh at his boss's jokes. Now *that's* paying your dues. He's gone on to make respectable jazz recordings, on which he keeps up with the likes of Tony Williams and Christian McBride.

Zinno, 126 W. 13th St. (924-5182)—A rarity among jazz clubs: somewhere you'd go to eat even if there were no music. Through Feb. 8: There's nothing that the talented young pianist **ERIC REED** can throw that the veteran bassist **RAY DRUMMOND** can't catch—in fact, it's Reed who'd better stay on his toes. Starting Feb. 10: **JOANNE BRACKEEN** (piano) and **CECIL MC BEE** (bass).

ROCK, ETC.

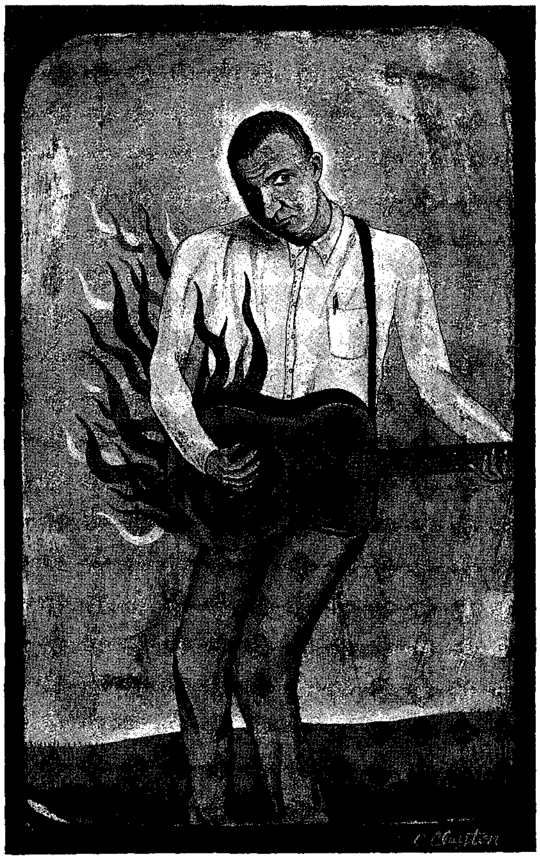
Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Feb. 5: Country star **PATTY LOVELESS.** Feb. 6: The **LAURA LOVE** band. Imagine the melodies of Irish music atop the busy rhythms of funk and jazz, and you'll have some idea of what this talented bass-playing singer-songwriter calls her "Afro-Celtic" sound. With elements of gospel and Native American music coursing through, too, it's no wonder that her culturally kaleidoscopic album, "The Laura Love Collection," is on the Putumayo World Music label. With the darkly enigmatic musings of singer-songwriter **FERRON.** Feb. 7: Another installment of "In Their Own Words" finds songwriters **PATTY GRIFFIN, ALEJANDRO ESCOVEDO, CHIP TAYLOR,** and others getting together for some talkin' and singin'. Feb. 8: **TRACY NELSON** and the **LAURA LOVE** band.

Brownies, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—Feb. 6: **FLUFFER,** a fierce all-female grunge band from England. Feb. 7: Sub-grunge rock with **THIN LIZARD DAWN.** Feb. 8: The **LYRES.** In the early eighties, when punk and New Wave were losing their flavor and the airwaves were saturated with synth-pop and heavy metal, a few bands started playing vintage Vox guitars and Farfisa organs, wearing Beatle boots, and singing about the big issues—cars and beer and, of course, girls. The garage revival was short-lived, but the Lyres, one of the genre's ablest practitioners, prove that in the right hands a good riff, a solid beat, and sneering, adenoidal vocals are never tiresome.

Chicago B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Dedicated to the music of the Windy City. Feb. 7-8: **ROOMFUL OF BLUES** combines the best of the Fabulous Thunderbirds and Vegas showmanship.

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Transplanted British guitarist **FRANCIS DUNNERY** (Feb. 11) has employed a novel setup during his recent "residencies" at small clubs: acoustic guitar and laptop—the better to remember freshly written lyrics with. The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Feb. 7: **THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS.** It's been a decade since John Flansburgh and John Linnell first performed jerky little pop songs while wearing improbably enormous masks. The Brooklyn-based duo have been unmasked for some time, but their jerky little pop songs—precociously crafted and full of surreal humor—still flow unabated. Feb. 8: **"WORD: LIFE,"** an all-day music-and-poetry seminar followed by a concert featuring **VERNON REID, CHUCK D, BILL LASWELL, BERNIE WORRELL, JERU THE DAMAJA, NTOZAKE SHANGE,** and **THE LAST POETS.** Feb. 11: **SILVERCHAIR.** Fronted by a seventeen-year-old Kurt Cobain look-alike, these Australian munchkins enjoyed massive success last year by ripping off the music of Nirvana and Pearl Jam. Now they're back, a little older but still clueless. . . . ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday. The dancers share a passion for the Lindy Hop, a dance that involves a lot of whirling and the occasional display of underwear. Sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.



Bob Mould, at the Knitting Factory.

CHRISTIAN CLAYTON

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—The Knit continues its tenth-anniversary celebrations. Feb. 6: Experimental guitarist **FRED FRITH** plays solo, and scrupulous keyboard eclectic **WAYNE HORVITZ** teams up with saxophonist **BRIGGAN KRAUSS.** Feb. 8: **BOB MOULD.** "This one is for me," the post-punk hero writes in the liner notes of "Bob Mould," his first album since his explosive trio, Sugar, dissolved in 1995. If you think this brutal, beautiful record represents his all, wait until you see him in person. With **REBECCA MOORE.** Feb. 9: **JOHN ZORN.** Feb. 10: **DIAMANDA GALÁS.** To those who don't belong to the cult of Galás, her bilingual ululation suggests a woman possessed alternately by the spirits of Tina Turner, Yoko Ono, and a Greek dominatrix. Recently, she teamed up with John Paul Jones, the former Led Zeppelin bassist, to record "The Sporting Life," a jazz-and-blues-flavored album that was abrasively fascinating. Feb. 11: **DJ SPOOKY AND CULTURAL ALCHEMY.**

Manny's Car Wash, 1558 Third Ave., at 87th St. (369-2583)—The Upper East Side blues. Feb. 7: **SLAPMEAT JOHNSON AND THE TITANS.** Feb. 8: The **SUSAN TEDESCHI** band.

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Feb. 5: The **FRANCIS DUNNERY** band (see Fez). With **DRIVING BLIND.** Feb. 6: **ANNA DOMINO** and **LAZY BOY.** A year before Sade turned the sultry-chanteuse act into a money-spinner, Domino—who's lived in Japan, Italy, and Belgium—released her own cool collection of international jazz, but she never hit the big time. Her voice, unlike Sade's, is more sandpaper than filigree. She almost never emotes, and she likes to ride her melodies deep in the lower registers. She also plays a bitchin' accordion. The New York trio Lazy Boy makes guitar-driven, noirish instrumental music that recalls the work of Chris Isaak (minus the vocals, of course) and of Angelo Badalamenti (particularly for David Lynch's creepy movie "Wild at Heart"). The guitar drips with secret-agent echo, the bass murmurs and pleads like a broken heart, and the snare drum cracks with Spartan authority—an evocative soundtrack for your own private movie. Feb. 10: **SILVERJET** and **NERF HERDER.** Feb. 11: **SPACE,** the latest high-quality import from England.

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—A great grass hut with a fruit-and-bamboo motif, dedicated to calypso, reggae, and the bossa nova. Feb. 11: **BUCKWHEAT ZYDECO.** The eponymous ambassador of zydeco music (a Creole gumbo of accordion-heavy grooves) is a true party professional. Seasoned by decades of touring, he knows how to make even the most uptight New York crowd dance. Keep your eye on the washboard player. Dining.

Supper Club, 240 W. 47th St. (921-1940)—Feb. 11: **MARIANNE FAITHFULL.** Her voice—a knowing mix of gravel, steel, and honey—suggests how much she has gone through. Her autobiography, published in 1995, gives the details: British pop stardom, drug addiction, and emotional collapse, followed by a spectacularly dignified return. Last year, the Courtney Love of her generation released "A Secret Life," which adds a fine new chapter to her story, thanks to Angelo Badalamenti's generous orchestrations and Faithfull's brutally confessional lyrics.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—Feb. 5-6: More Blondie than Abba, the **CARDIGANS** have taken Swedish good looks and kitschy melody to uncharted territory. They're one of the most likable bands to have enjoyed widespread success in a long time, and in concert their good cheer is as contagious as their candy-coated pop. Feb. 7: An evening of Creole-flavored dance music with **TERRANCE SIMIEN & THE MALLET PLAYBOYS.** Feb. 8: The **FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE.** Named after a statuary shop in their native suburban New Jersey, this immensely gifted four-piece band is currently best known for writing the title track of Tom Hanks's "That Thing You Do!" Like the Beatle-esque combo in the movie, they have an easygoing, easily digestible sound that's so melodic it's almost unfashionable.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Tiepolo and Tiepolo's Venice." The largest of the museum's trio of exhibitions related to Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770) and his circle features eighty paintings and thirty-three etchings by the eighteenth-century Italian master—predominantly larger works, decorative series, and oil sketches. (See also the Morgan Library.) . . . ¶ The Costume Institute's much heralded "Christian Dior" blockbuster displays more than eighty opulent items from the decade beginning in 1947, when the designer first presented his influential New Look. Through March 23. . . . ¶ "Late Klee" showcases twenty seldom-seen drawings, paintings, and watercolors from 1925 to 1940. Through April 13. . . . ¶ "The Gods of War: Sacred Imagery and the Decoration of Arms and Armor." (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

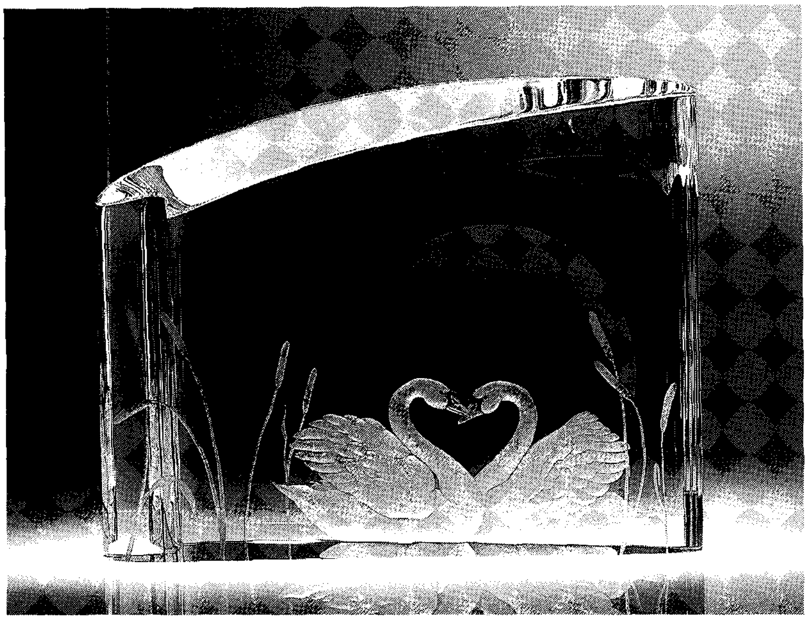
Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings, the 1980s." Forty examples from the Abstract Expressionist's final working decade. Through April 29. (For more de Kooning, see Galleries—Uptown.) . . . ¶ "The Maximal Sixties: Pop, Op, and Figuration." Iconic work by Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Polke, Fahlström, Samaras, and other Aquarian artists. Through April 29. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—"Rrose Is a Rrose Is a Rrose: Gender Performance in Photography." The title plays on "mannish" Gertrude Stein's most famous line of poetry as well as on the name of Marcel Duchamp's transvestite alter ego, Rrose Sélavy. The exhibition's curator, Jennifer Blessing, has assembled eighty photographic portraits and multipart montages by twenty-four artists—from Brassaï and Man Ray to Yasumasa Morimura, Matthew Barney, and Cindy Sherman—whose work engages that fashionable topic the construction of gender identity. But the quality and intelligence of the choices and their juxtapositions make this show anything but a retread of familiar material. Another plus is the surprising work by little-known artists: keep an eye out for Jürgen Klauke and Claude Cahun. Through April 27. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 575 Broadway, at Prince St. (423-3500)—"The Messenger" and "The Crossing," two video installations by Bill Viola. Through March 23. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—"Making Mischief," an excellent exhibition chronicling the Dada invasion of New York, from the Great War through the early twenties. Through Feb. 23. . . . ¶ "A Passion for Pictures: Selections from the Charles H. Carpenter Collection and Selections from the Charles Simon Collection" follows the recent trend toward museum shows focussed on the acquisition rather than the making of art, displaying work donated by two of the Whitney's major benefactors. Simon's tastes inclined to realists and modernists from the first half of the century; Carpenter's are wider-ranging and engagingly quirky. The star of the show is Robert Colescott's brilliantly parodistic "Jus' Folks by Vermeer," a large, bright, posterlike painting showing a Vermeerish Aunt Jemima pouring milk into a bowl. Through March 9. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

Whitney Museum at Philip Morris, 120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (878-2550)—"Romare Bearden in Black and White: Photomontage Projections 1964." These twenty-four works were made after the politically concerned artists in the Spiral group abandoned their plan to create a collaborative collage about African-Americans. Carrying on alone, Bearden assem-



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bled small collages in color, principally from photos snipped from magazines, then enlarged them into black-and-white Photostats. The pictures are variously warm and evocative; everywhere, the patchwork faces and figures suggest the fragmentation of American society. Through March 20. (Open Mondays through Fridays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 11 to 7:30.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—The renovated Hall of Vertebrate Origins is open, its dropped ceiling removed to reveal Calvert Vaux's skylit design. All the better to see the dunkleosteus, a sixteen-foot-long hanging model of an armored fish, based on the four-foot-long fossil of its head, with self-sharpening jawbones. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—The museum's extensive Chinese collection has handsome new quarters in which a careful, lucid presentation offers a broad look at the art of the Middle Kingdom, from Neolithic stone carvings to blue-and-white ceramics of the late Ch'ing dynasty. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

Jewish Museum, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (423-3200)—"Rico Lebrun: The Holocaust Paintings" raises the usual unanswerable questions about aestheticizing atrocities. The Expressionist Lebrun (1900-64) was born in Italy and settled in California; inspired by photographs taken after the camps were liberated, he created twelve large-scale works in a drab, limited palette. Given their subject, they are somehow too rhythmic and beautifully balanced to be as disturbing as they should be. Through April 13. (Open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. (685-0008)—"Tiepolo and His Circle: Drawings in American Collections," the first course of this year's tercentennial feast in celebration of the eighteenth-century Venetian painter (for the main course, see the Metropolitan Museum). More than a hundred works on paper—by the painter, his sons, and his students—illustrate the development of his distinctively dramatic compositions along with increasingly triumphant solutions to the problems of perspective posed by ceiling frescoes. Through April 13. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10:30 to 5; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

New-York Historical Society, 2 W. 77th St., at Central Park W. (873-3400)—"Before Central Park: The Life and Death of Seneca Village," an exhibition devoted to the African-American and Irish community that was razed to make way for Central Park, includes an impressionistic re-creation of one of its streets (85th Street, near Sixth Avenue), histories of some typical residents (Andrew Williams, bootblack; Epiphany Davis, porter), and a reference center at which museumgoers can consult Seneca Village maps, census records, and affidavits. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5.)

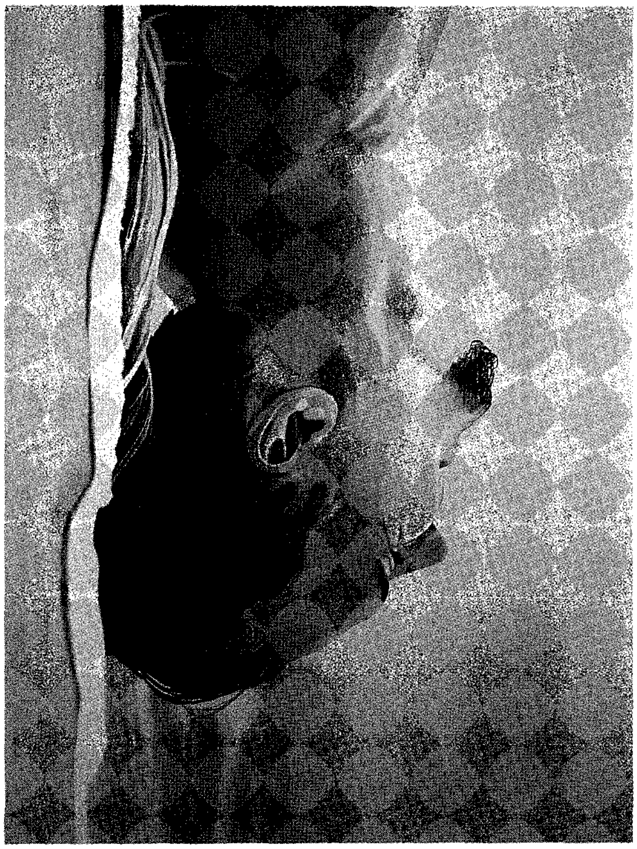
Schomburg Center, Malcolm X Blvd. at 135th St. (491-2265)—"Bearing Witness: African-American Vernacular Art of the South" highlights woodcarvings, scarecrows, clay figurines, clubhouse frescoes, paintings, and other works by self-taught artists. Through March 29. (Open Mondays through Wednesdays, noon to 8; Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 5.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, uptown and downtown galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; Chelsea galleries are generally closed Tuesdays and open Sundays.)

Earl Cunningham (1893-1977)—A willful primitive, originally from Maine, who settled in Florida; his boyish delight in the tropics is fully communicated in these fifty-five small, exuberant works, nearly all of them paintings. The glossy seas and skies are lemon, orchid, or salmon; the trees and bushes bear tiny impastoed blossoms that look like Murano millefiori; the strutting birds flaunt preposterous emerald crests; the fishermen dangle wee catches like red yo-yos; and the effect is utterly endearing. Through March 1. (Beacon Hill Fine Art, 980 Madison Ave., at 67th St. 734-3636.)

Wilfrid-Gabriel de Glehn (1870-1951)—Forty-eight paintings by an English Impressionist who deserves to be better known here. His work often recalls that of his friend John Singer Sargent (sixteen of whose paintings are included in this show) in its slick appeal and its self-consciously magisterial looseness—and perhaps in its superficiality, too. If it's finally unsatisfying, that's partly because it sometimes—for example, in the luscious "Hydrangeas by the Studio Window" or the shimmery "Children Playing in the Water at Wilton"—comes so teasingly close to greatness. Through March 15. (Spanierman, 45 E. 58th St. 832-0208.)



"Sean Number Three" (1996), by Peter Cain (Marks).

Robert De Niro (1922-93)—The artist belonged to the second generation of the New York School; the nineteen large, strikingly confident paintings here offer monumental forms, mostly figural, in surprising, sweet pastel colors defined with thick dark lines. The five looming nudes in "Bathers in Landscape" are particularly successful, and "Still Life with Portrait Bust" is an assured distillation enlivened with glowing spruce greens and bold touches of white. Through Feb. 8. (Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. 879-6606. Open Mondays.)

Agnes Martin—Together, these sixteen recent works by the fastidious New Mexican painter are more effective than any of them could possibly be in isolation. The huge canvases are filled with horizontal stripes of varying widths, usually in combinations of white, cream, and the palest possible baby blue or peach, sometimes separated by thin, blurry lines, sometimes softly stippled. The restraint promotes tranquillity, but it's hard to decide if you are looking at something chastely spiritual or numbingly tasteful. Through Feb. 15. (Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292.)

Stuart Shils—A refreshing show of twenty deceptively modest works: little landscapes (most are about a foot square) painted in oil on primed paper. Some, like two Irish scenes, are such bold distillations that without their titles you might think they were nonrepresentational. Yet these pictures, as well as more detailed ones such as the confident "Buildings and Trees in Sunlight" and the shimmering "Rooftops with Snow, Early Morning," capture particular places in specific lights with virtuoso economy. Through Feb. 8. (De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 262-5050.)

"That Way Madness Lies: Expressionism and the Art of Gugging"—The artists at the Gugging mental hospital, near Vienna, most of whom have no prospect of recovery, had their first show in 1970. Displaying their work alongside that of various Expressionists, who tended to glorify madness (and many of whom—Gerstl, Beckmann, Kokoschka, Schiele—had some history of mental illness themselves), is a fruitful idea. The patients' intense output stands up well against the Expressionists'; Johann Fischer's memorable "Woman Ski Jumper" is fine enough to pass for the real thing. Through March 15. (Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 245-6734.)

Short List—**cho duck hyun,** Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St. 752-0124. Through Feb. 15. . . . **willem de kooning,** Marks, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St. 243-0200. Through March 29. . . . **dan flavin** and **kazimir malevich,** Danese, 41 E. 57th St. 223-2227. Both shows through Feb. 8. . . . **patti smith,** Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. 980-5454. Through Feb. 8.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Peter Cain (1959-97)—Three large paintings of a man's head, sunburned, apparently from lying on the beach on one of those cloudy days we have all been warned about, and six smaller Los Angeles industryscapes. The artist's flat poster palette elicits the familiar ache of home videos played on mute; as in his earlier portraits of radically truncated cars, there is a feeling that something is missing, and it's both comical and unsettling. The show includes the last completed works of the artist, who died last month. Through March 15. (Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200.)

Rudolf Stingel—New paintings and an installation by the Italian artist. The former are in brilliant Warholian colors against black grounds; although they give the impression of vivid gesture, their forms are in fact generated by a quasi-mechanical method developed by the artist. The large-scale installation takes advantage of the architectural drama of Cooper's new space: Stingel has covered much of the gallery floor in staggeringly bright pink-and-red-striped wall-to-wall, adding a tall pale-blue screen as a divider. Through Feb. 22. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105. Open Tuesdays, closed Sundays.)

"Three Rooms: Vito Acconci, James Turrell, Gilberto Zorio"—Acconci's utterly uncomfortable pieces give the category "art furniture" a mordant twist; here he contributes a 1992 set—sofa, bed, table, and ladder-back chair (think Mackintosh)—made of aluminum and fluorescent lighting fixtures. Turrell's "Raethro," a projected-light piece creating the illusion of a three-dimensional pyramid, seems technically sophisticated but rather jejune, until you notice the early date: 1967, the heyday of the dematerialized art object. Zorio, a member of the Italian Arte Povera movement, offers "Star to Purify Words" (1978), a large leather star pierced by an alcohol-

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Gil Shaham, Violin—*Romances (DG)* **163-964**

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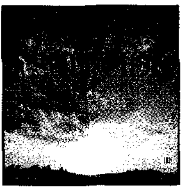
Mozart: *Magic Flute Gardiner cond. (Archiv)* **166-736/396-739**


Voices Of Ascension—*Chant To Renaissance (Delos)* **166-678**

Yanni—*Live At The Acropolis (Private Music)* **475-178**

Adams: *The Chairman Dances; Harmonielehre; more. Rattle cond. (EMI Classics)* **485-573**

Gil Shaham—*Violin Sonatas by Saint-Saens, Franck and Ravel (DG)* **485-268**

Berlioz: *Messe Solennelle. Monteverdi Choir; John E. Gardiner cond. (Philips)* **478-917**

J.S. Bach: *Suites For Orchestra. Hogwood cond. (L'oiseau Lyre)* **476-952/396-952**

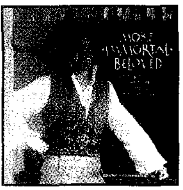
Cecilia Bartoli—*Rossini: La Cenerentola (London)* **469-098/399-097**

Maria Callas—*La Divina (EMI Classics)* **467-480**

Simon Rattle—*Prokofiev: Symphony No.5, Scythian Suite (EMI Classics)* **467-209**

Anne-Sophie Mutter—*Mozart: Violin Concerto No.1 In B Flat (EMI Classics)* **434-209**

Enya—*Watermark (Reprise)* **431-403**



More "Immortal Beloved"—*Orig. Sndtrk. (music of Beethoven) (Sony Class.)* **167-304**

Sibelius: *Valse Triste; Sym. No. 2; Swan Of Tuonela. Jansons cond. (EMI Classics)* **464-958**

Itzhak Perlman and Pinchas Zukerman—*Bach: Violin Concertos No. 1, 2; etc. (EMI Classics)* **464-735**

Itzhak Perlman—*Brahms: Violin Concerto. Barenboim, Berlin Phil. (EMI Classics)* **459-842**

Fauré: *Piano Quartets. Ax, Stern, Laredo, Ma. (Sony Class.)* **458-554**

Maxim Vengerov—*Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn: Violin Concertos (Teldec)* **453-969**

Mischa Maisky—*Schubert: Songs Without Words; Arpeggione Sonata (DG)* **166-728**

Roger Norrington—*Rossini: Overtures; London Class. Players (EMI Classics)* **420-521**

Mozart: *Syms. 39 & 41, "Jupiter." Norrington, London Class. Players. (EMI Classics)* **420-513**

SOMETHING WONDERFUL
RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN
Bryn Terfel Sings Rodgers & Hammerstein—*Something Wonderful (DG)* **166-710**

Roger Norrington—*Early Romantic Overtures (EMI Classics)* **406-090**

Sarah Chang, Violin—*Debut (EMI Classics)* **448-431**

Handel: *Water Music. Marriner cond., ASMF (EMI Classics)* **401-638**

Billy McLaughlin—*Fingerdance (Narada)* **168-997**

Rossini's Ghost—*Various Artists (Sony Class.)* **167-528**

Samuel Ramey—*Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye (Sony Class.)* **167-510**

Guitar Fingerstyle—*Various Artists (Narada)* **167-346**

The Boston Pops Orchestra—*Runnin' Wild. Keith Lockhart cond. (RCA Victor)* **166-652**

Julianne Baird—*Handel Arias (Newport Classic)* **165-266**

Pangea *(eastwest World)* **161-901**

Out Classics
Out Classics—*music by Barber, Bernstein, Chopin, Schubert, more. (RCA Red Seal)* **166-660**

Renee Fleming—*Strauss: Four Last Songs; Rosenkavalier Suite; etc. (RCA Victor)* **165-233**

Peter Schreier, Andras Schiff—*Schubert: Die Schöne Müllerin (London)* **165-225**

Quartetto Italiano—*Schubert: Quartets Nos. 12,13,14,15 (Philips)* **165-217/395-210**

David Lanz—*Sacred Road (Narada)* **165-183**

Beethoven: *Piano Sonatas, Op.10. Alfred Brendel (Philips)* **163-980**

L'Archibudelli—*Brahms: String Sextets (Sony Class.)* **163-600**

Stravinsky: *The Rake's Progress. Nagano, Upshaw, Hadley, Ramey (Erato)* **162-420/392-423**

Placido Domingo—*Bajo El Cielo Espanol (Sony Class.)* **160-648**

Haydn—*Symphonies Nos. 96, 102, 103 "Drum Roll." L. Slatkin cond. (RCA Red Seal)* **158-345**

Wynton Marsalis—*In Gabriel's Garden (Sony Class.)* **157-149**

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Gounod: *Romeo Et Juliette. Domingo, Swenson; Slatkin cond. (RCA Red Seal)* **156-448/396-440**

Schubert: *Octet. Mozzafiato and L'Archibudelli (Vivarte)* **156-281**

John Williams and The Boston Pops—*Summon The Heroes; Official Theme Of The '96 Olympics; Vangelis, more. (Sony Class.)* **156-273**

Bartok: *The Miraculous Mandarin; Music For Strings, Percussion And Celesta. Pierre Boulez cond. (DG)* **154-658**

The Benedictine Monks Of Santo Domingo—*Chant III (Angel)* **165-746**

Beethoven: *Piano Con. Nos. 3 & 4. Mitsuko Uchido, piano (Philips)* **154-633**

Goldenthal: *Fire, Water, Paper: A Vietnam Oratorio. Carl St. Clair cond. (Sony Class.)* **154-559**

Secret Garden—*Songs From A Secret Garden (Philips)* **154-021**

Victoria: *Requiem. Paul McCreesh cond. (Archiv)* **152-058**

Glenn Gould—*Bach: Partitas BWV 825-830; Preludes and Fugues (Sony Classical)* **150-250/390-252**

Prokofiev: *Romeo & Juliet (scenes from the ballet). M. T. Thomas (RCA Red Seal)* **149-070**

R. Strauss—*Sonatinen. Orpheus Chamber Orch. (DG)* **148-353**

Joseph Alessi—*New York Legends. Trombone chamber music: Bernstein, Rush. others (Cala)* **167-379**

Myung-Whun Chung—*Mystic: The Musical Visions Of Messiaen. (DG)* **148-445**

Wilhelm Kempff—*Beethoven Sonatas: Moonlight; Pathetique; 2 more (DG)* **147-033**

James Galway—*The French Recital (RCA Red Seal)* **146-977**

Hildegard von Bingen: *Voice Of The Blood. Sequentia (DHM)* **146-969**

Beethoven: *Syms. Nos. 5 & 7. Kleiber cond. (DG)* **146-597**

Mozart: *Clarinet Conc.; Clarinet Quintet. Stoltzman, Tokyo Quartet (RCA Red Seal)* **145-839**

Einhorn—*Voices Of Light. Anonymous 4, soloists, Wright cond. (Sony Class.)* **143-982**

Piffaro—*Canzoni E Danze. Wind music from Renaissance Italy. (Archiv)* **142-935**

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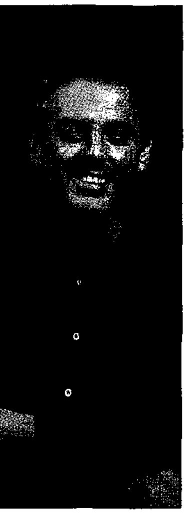

Barenboim/Mederos/ Console—*Tangos Among Friends* *(Teldec)* **162-057**

Beethoven: *"Triple Concerto." Oistrakh, Richter, Rostropovich and von Karajan cond.* *(EMI Classics)* **145-797**

Paul O'dette—*Dolcissima Et Amorosa. Early Italian Lute Music* *(Harmonia Mundi)* **145-888**

Celtic Voices: Women Of Song—*Various Artists* *(Narada)* **142-851**

Andrew Carwood—*Fayrfax: Missa O Quam Glorifica; more* *(ASV)* **141-440**

Roberto Alagna—*Operatic Arias* *(EMI Classics)* **141-424**

Kronos Quartet—*Kronos Released 1985-1995* *(Nonesuch)* **140-467/390-468**

Yevgeny Kissin—*The Legendary 1984 Moscow Concert. Chopin concertos, more.* *(RCA Red Seal)* **140-277**

Hilliard Ensemble—*Officium. Jan Garbarek, sax* *(ECM)* **134-056**

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Jim Brickman—*By Heart* *(Windham Hill)* **126-847**

Tangerine Dream—*Tyranny Of Beauty* *(Miramar)* **121-327**

Dennis Brain—*Mozart: Horn Concertos* *(EMI Classics)* **121-285**

Brahms: *Piano Conc. #2; more. Kovacevich, piano; Sawallisch cond.* *(EMI Classics)* **120-121**

"Immortal Beloved"—*Orig. Sndtrk. (music of Beethoven)* *(Sony Class.)* **114-504**

Marth Argerich/ Alexandre Rabinovitch—*Mozart: Sonatas For Two Pianos* *(Teldec)* **114-496**

Puccini: *La Boheme. Freni, Pavarotti, more; Karajan cond. (London)* **113-134/393-132**

Saint-Saens: *Sym. No. 3, "Organ"; Violin Con. No. 3. Jansons cond.* *(EMI Classics)* **113-050**

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Evelyn Glennie—*Drumming* *(Catalyst)* **163-949**

Wynton Marsalis—*London Concert. Haydn, Hummel, Fasch.* *(Sony Class.)* **113-035**

Acoustic Alchemy—*Against The Grain* *(GRP)* **111-054**

Itzhak Perlman—*Bits And Pieces* *(EMI Classics)* **108-142**

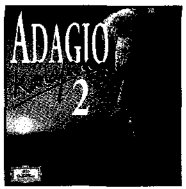
Paganini: *Violin Concerto No.1;* **Saint-Saens:** *Havanaise, more. Sarah Chang* *(EMI Classics)* **108-076**

Gilbert Seeley—*Part: Berliner Messe; Harrison: Mass To St. Anthony; Oregon Rep.* *(Koch)* **106-591**

Yo-Yo Ma, Cello—*The New York Album. Albert, Bartok, Bloch* *(Sony Class.)* **102-921**

Ruth Ann Swenson—*Positively Golden* *(EMI Classics)* **102-111**

Elgar: *Enigma Variations;* **Holst:** *The Planets. Composers conducting* *(EMI Classics)* **469-163**



Herbert von Karajan—*Adagio 2* *(DG)* **157-230**

Christopher Parkening—*Rodrigo: Concierto De Aranjuez; Walton: Five Bagatelles* *(EMI Classics)* **455-170**

Intimate Letters —*Janácek String Quartets, Juillard String Quartet* *(Sony Classical)* **154-542**

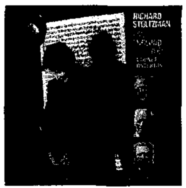
Handel: *Sosarme, Re di Media. Baird, Aler, Somary cond.* *(Newport Classic)* **165-282/395-285**

Schubert: *Wanderer;* **Schumann:** *Fantasie; more. Maurizio Pollini* *(DG)* **163-972**

Jos Van Immerseel—*Beethoven: Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 2* *(Sony Class.)* **163-592**

Ensemble Wien-berlin—*Schoenberg: Kleine Kammermusik* *(Sony Class.)* **162-412**

Shostakovich: *Symph. No.10;* **Mussorgsky:** *Songs and Dances Of Death. Jansons cond.* *(EMI Classics)* **121-202**



Richard Stoltzman—*Clarinet concertos: Foss, Englund and McKinley* *(RCA Victor)* **160-218**

Marcus Roberts—*Portraits In Blue (music of Gershwin)* *(Sony Class.)* **160-226**

Leonard Slatkin—*Copland: Dance Symphony; Short Symphony; more* *(RCA Red Seal)* **154-898**

Dawn Upshaw—*White Moon* *(Nonesuch)* **147-835**

Yo-Yo Ma, Cello—*Dvorak, Herbert: Cello Concertos* *(Sony Class.)* **143-990**

Keith Jarrett—*Handel: Suites For Keyboards* *(ECM New Series)* **141-432**

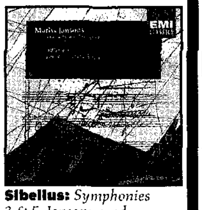
Dmitri Hvorostovsky—*My Restless Soul. Songs by Tchaikovsky, more.* *(Philips)* **137-752**

Ravel: *Orchestral Works, Vol. 1. La Valse; Bolero; more. G. Simon* *(Cala)* **114-009**

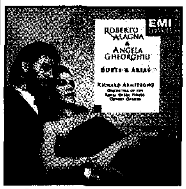
Honegger: *Sym. Nos. 2 & 3; Pacific 231. Mariss Jansons cond.* *(EMI Classics)* **102-095**

Awadagin Pratt—*A Long Way From Normal. Piano works: Liszt, more* *(EMI Classics)* **102-053**

His Majestie's Clerkes—*Goostly Psalmes* *(Harmonia Mundi)* **167-437**



Sibelius: *Symphonies 3 & 5. Jansons cond.* *(EMI Classics)* **156-489**



Roberto Alagna, Angela Gheorghiu—*Duets And Arias* *(EMI Classics)* **156-463**

Hannibal: *African Portraits. Barenboim cond. (Teldec)* **146-951**

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filled javelin; it's poetic in a typically go-figure Arte Povera way. Through Feb. 15. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 206-9300.)

Short List—**HEIDE FASNACHT,** Maynes, 529 W. 20th St. 741-3318. Through Feb. 23. . . . **ALIX STEWART LAMBERT,** Team, 527 W. 26th St. 279-9219. Open Fridays through Sundays; through March 2. . . . **MARNIE WEBER,** Fredericks, 504 W. 22nd St. 633-6555. Through March 2.

ONLY CONNECT

The Spanker (http://www.spanker.com)—Even as the *Wall Street Journal* proclaims that there's no money to be made in cyberspace and as corporations abandon their Web sites with all the alacrity of Lot departing Sodom, personal Web pages continue to sprout like dandelions. Any number of individuals out there want to tell you more about themselves and their passions than you had ever hoped to know, and it's the Spanker's job to see that these sites get the response they deserve.

What began as a labor of sarcasm on the part of a staffer at *Total New York* (the best New York City-centered Webzine around) has mutated into a sort of "America's Funniest Home Pages." While some Webmeisters object to being spanked, others now send their U.R.L.s directly to the Spanker, begging for attention. As January's World Wide Web Wanker Awards remind us, the Web is still full of places you'd rather not go, drawers you'll wish you hadn't opened. The "freakiest Website created by the hormonally challenged" award went to Jade, a Christian cross-dresser who "brought a classiness and a spook factor to the World Wide Web that has been sorely missing," while the "Koresh Kook of the Year" award went to a home page that featured a smiley face superimposed on a crucifix.

You can't make this kind of stuff up, and the Spanker doesn't try. The format is simple: on the left appears a transcript of an imaginary talk-show-style dialogue between the Spanker and the creators of the sites up for a spanking that week; click on a site name and it appears on the right. Some of what you'll find here defies description; there are sites that might make you sick. It's as if a nation of Rupert Pupkins were able to broadcast their own shows simultaneously, each one a shrine to a girlfriend, motorcycle, guitar, or iguana. The "Wanker of the Year" award went to a young man proudly displaying his kidney stone: "Your site shows a calculated effort to cultivate the very essence of wankfulness," wrote the Spanker, "and enshrine it in HTML."

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

John Baldessari—"National City Part Two–1996," a superb group of new paintings by the grand master of California conceptualism. He grew up in little National City, just south of San Diego, and it was here, in the late sixties, that he first made text paintings and photo-emulsions on canvas. Last year he went back. The new canvases adhere to the old format, and many retain the moody grisaille palette; in some, however, the artist has made striking use of a more recent technique, ink-jet color printing on canvas. The streets and buildings Baldessari photographs are typically undistinguished—Nowheresville, U.S.A.—but the effect is a kind of strung-out, So-Cal Baudelairean poetry. Through Feb. 8. (Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway. 966-6160.)

Nabil Nahas—Medium- and large-scale paintings featuring thickly built-up surfaces of acrylic pigment mixed with pumice. The colors are often startlingly, even jarringly, bright, and their combinations can really set your eyeballs spinning. Through Feb. 15. (Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. 431-3685.)

Robert Smithson (1938-73) / **Massimo Antonaci**—"Issues of Entropy," works on paper and a large sculpture by the seminal sixties figure, whose interest in states of disorder and decay continues to have a profound influence on younger artists. The Weber gallery does a great service in regularly showing his work; now it's time for a major museum to mount a comprehensive retrospective. / "Has Become the Keystone of the Arch," five glass panels that the Italian artist calls metaphysical Polaroids. Both shows through Feb. 8. (142 Greene St. 966-6115.)

Robert Whitman—"Great Lakes" (1996), a new installation by one of the original "happenings" artists of the late fifties and early sixties. He uses various mixed-medium elements (mirror fragments, objets trouvés, a scrim, video projections), and his elaborate mise en scène recalls his intense involvement with avant-garde theatre. On the whole, though, this installation pales in comparison with his last show here. Through Feb. 8. (Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St. 431-9224.)

Short List—**MARINA ABRAMOVIC,** Sean Kelly, 43 Mercer St. 343-2405. Through Feb. 22. . . . **NANCY CHUNN,** Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232. Through Feb. 15. . . . **SHERRY KERLIN,** Thorp, 103 Prince St. 431-6880. Through March 1. . . . **ANNETTE MESSAGER,** Gagosian, 136 Wooster St. 228-2828. Through Feb. 22. . . . **ROBERT MORRIS,** Castelli, 420 West Broadway. 431-5160. Through Feb. 8. . . . **SHERYL RUBINSTEIN,** Bridgewater/Lustberg, 560 Broadway. 941-6355. Through Feb. 8. . . . **BIANCA SFORNI,** Kasmin, 74 Grand St. 219-3219. Through Feb. 22.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Christie's—Feb. 8: An auction of fine wines. . . . ¶ Feb. 11: A sale that features oils by nineteenth-century masters made famous through their success at Paris Salon exhibitions, including Gérôme, Delacroix, and Corot. (Park Ave. at 59th St. 546-1000.)

Sotheby's—Feb. 5: African, Oceanic, Native American, and Latin-American art. . . . ¶ Feb. 6: An arcade auction of modestly priced Old Master oils. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Swann—An auction of autographs particularly rich in the areas of musical figures and Confederate generals. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710. Feb. 6 at 10:30 A.M.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Bruce Davidson—"American Photographs," a survey of the artist's career, including pictures of a Brooklyn gang, residents of Spanish Harlem, subway riders, civil-rights demonstrators, and Central Park. Through Feb. 22. (Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. 628-5300.)

Yasuhiro Ishimoto—Thirty black-and-white photographs made in Chicago between 1950 and 1961. The subjects include children with masks, cars, bathers, and street scenes. In the small gallery there is a complementary selection of works by Ishimoto's Chicago teachers Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind. Both shows through Feb. 22. (Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. 226-1220.)

Louise Lawler—Large-scale abstract photographs of the new Metro Pictures space taken as it was nearing completion. Through March 15. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 206-7100. Open Tuesdays; closed Saturdays.)

David Levinthal—The first large survey of the artist's series of inanimate figures in elaborate dioramas: cowboys, storm troopers, bathing beauties, Japanese-made sex-and-bondage figurines, blackface icons. Through March 21. (International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8. . . . ¶ A complementary show

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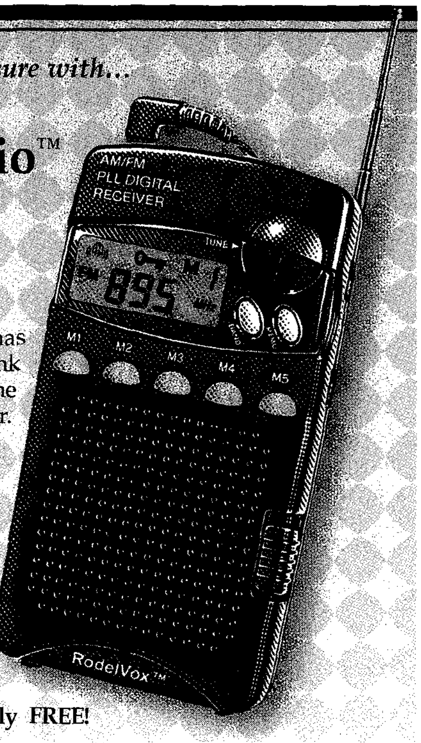


of the "Blackface" series is at Borden, 560 Broadway, through Feb. 28. 431-0166.)

Andrew Moore—Single-image color views of the dilapidated interiors of Times Square theatres. The vaulted smoking room of the New Amsterdam Theatre becomes a charred, cold chamber; a peeling dressing room, bathed in stop-light red, looks as if it's heard more than its share of backstage whispers. "Grand Luncheonette," the only exterior on view, captures a dingy, chrome-faced diner and with it some of the spirit of the best New York street photography. Through Feb. 15. (Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255.)

"Hope Photographs"—A wide-ranging selection of work by ninety contemporary artists, including Mario Cravo Neto, Flor Garduño, Ernesto Bazan, Andrea Modica, and Ann Rhoney. Through March 1. (National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. 475-3424. Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 11 to 6; Tuesdays, 3 to 6.)

"Akira" (1992), by Mario Cravo Neto, in the exhibition "Hope Photographs," at the National Arts Club.

"Zeitgeist Becomes Form: German Fashion Photography, 1945-1995"—Close to two hundred works by thirty-nine photographers, including Regina Relang, Hubs Flöter, Helmut Newton, Ellen von Unwerth, and Wolfgang Tillmans. Through Feb. 23. (Hearn, 727-7366, and Morris Healy, 243-3753, both at 530 W. 22nd St.)

Short List—**MARK ABRAHAMSON**, Eno, 594 Broadway. 226-5342. Through Feb. 13. . . . **KARL BLOSSFELDT**, Petzel, 26 Wooster St. 334-9466. Through March 8. . . . **KONRAD CRAMER**, Morthland, 225 Tenth Ave., at 23rd St. 242-7767. Through March 2. . . . **ADOLF FASSBENDER**, Gallery 292, 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through Feb. 22. . . . **KENRO IZU**, Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010. Through Feb. 22. . . . **PETER LINDBERGH**, Danziger, 130 Prince St. 226-0056. Through March 1. . . . **JOEL MEYEROWITZ**, Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766. Through March 15. . . . **ELI REED**, Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051. Opens Saturdays at noon; through March 8. . . . **HERB RITTS**, Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223. Through Feb. 22. . . . **WALTER ROSENBLUM**, Mann, 42 E. 76th St. 570-1223. Through March 1. . . . **DAVID STEPHENSON** and **MAXWELL MACKENZIE**, Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747. Both shows through Feb. 15. . . . **JOEL STERNFELD** and **ROBERT FRANK**, Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999. Both shows through Feb. 22.

(See the museum listings for a photography exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Alice Tully Hall is 875-5050; for Avery Fisher Hall, 875-5030; for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800; and for the 92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St., 996-1100.)

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—**CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA** and **PAGLIACCI**, with Ghena Dimitrova, Kristján Jóhannsson, and Vassili Gerello in the former, and Diana Soviero, Johan Botha, and Leo Nucci in the latter; Simone Young conducts both. (Feb. 5 at 8.) . . . With Bruno Pola instead of Mr. Gerello. (Feb. 8 at 8.) . . . **LE NOZZE DI FIGARO**, with Hei-Kyung Hong, Barbara Bonney, Dawn Upshaw, James Morris, and Michele Pertusi; Leopold Hager. (Feb. 6 at 8.) . . . With Kiri te Kanawa, Barbara Bonney, Dawn Upshaw, James Morris, and Jeffrey Black; Leopold Hager. (Feb. 8 at 1:30.) . . . **UN BALLO IN MASCHERA**, with Deborah Voigt, Youngok Shin, Florence Quivar, Luciano Pavarotti, and Juan Pons; James Levine. (Feb. 7 at 8.) . . . With Barbara Dever instead of Ms. Quivar. (Feb. 11 at 7:30.) . . . **WOZZECK**, in the opening performance of a new production, with Maria Ewing and Falk Struckmann; Mr. Levine. (Feb. 10 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

Opera Orchestra of New York—Though concert excerpts from Wagner's "Tristan und Isolde" surface regularly on orchestral programs, the whole opera (and, of course, there's *lots* of it) has been conspicuously absent from New York's theatres. The Metropolitan Opera last presented it in 1984, with generally disastrous results, and has held it in the wings since then, waiting until it can find suitable singers for the enormously taxing leading roles. (The other essential element, a superb orchestra led by a distinguished Wagnerian, it already has.) The time is apparently nigh: the Met is said to be planning a revival for its 1999-2000 season. In the meantime, Opera Orchestra of New York makes a brave attempt at this imposing masterpiece (with all the traditional cuts restored, no less), with Elizabeth Connell as Isolde, Heikki Siukola as Tristan, and Eve Queler on the podium in this concert performance. (Carnegie Hall. Feb. 9 at 1.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—Kurt Masur conducts Britten's "War Requiem," with soloists Carol Vaness (soprano), Jerry Hadley (tenor), and Thomas Hampson (baritone); the Westminster Symphonic Choir; and the American Boychoir. Samuel Wong leads the "chamber orchestra within an orchestra" that many passages require. (Avery Fisher Hall. Feb. 5-8 at 8.)

Atlanta Symphony—Yoel Levi conducts Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 2 (with André Watts) and Mahler's Symphony No. 6. (Carnegie Hall. Feb. 5 at 8.)

New European Strings—The keystone of the orchestra's first New York performance promises to be the masterly transcription of Bach's "Goldberg" Variations which the group's founder, the violinist Dmitry Sitkovetsky, made several years ago. Also on the program are two other chamber-orchestra adaptations by Mr. Sitkovetsky, of Strauss's "Capriccio" Overture and Stravinsky's Concerto for Orchestra. (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 8 at 8.)

Budapest Festival Orchestra—Ivan Fischer leads Bartók's "Transylvanian Dances" and "Romanian Folk Dances," in addition to Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto (with Robert McDuffie) and Brahms's Symphony No. 1. (Whitman Hall, Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Brooklyn College. 718-951-4500. Feb. 9 at 2. . . . ¶ Avery Fisher Hall. Feb. 10 at 7:30.)

Orchestre National de France—Charles Dutoit conducts Berlioz's "Benvenuto Cellini" Overture, Beethoven's Violin Concerto (with Pinchas Zukerman), and Stravinsky's "Petrouchka." (Avery Fisher Hall. Feb. 9 at 3.)

Monteverdi and His Contemporaries—David Schuler directs the Choir of the Church of St. Luke In-the-Fields in psalm settings by Monteverdi, in a concert that also includes works by Alessandro Grandi, Giovanni Gabrieli, and other luminaries of the Venetian Baroque. (487 Hudson St., at Grove St. Feb. 9 at 4. Tickets at the door.)

New Amsterdam Singers—Haydn's "Paukenmesse" (also known as the "Mass in Time of War") shares the bill with Charles Fussel's "Specimen Days," in a benefit concert directed by Clara Longstreth. (John Jay Theatre, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. Feb. 9 at 4. For information about tickets, call 568-5948.)

Philadelphia Orchestra—Wolfgang Sawallisch conducts Stravinsky's Divertimento from "Le Baiser de la Fée," Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 1 (with violinist Gil Shaham), and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4. (Carnegie Hall. Feb. 11 at 8.)

RECITALS

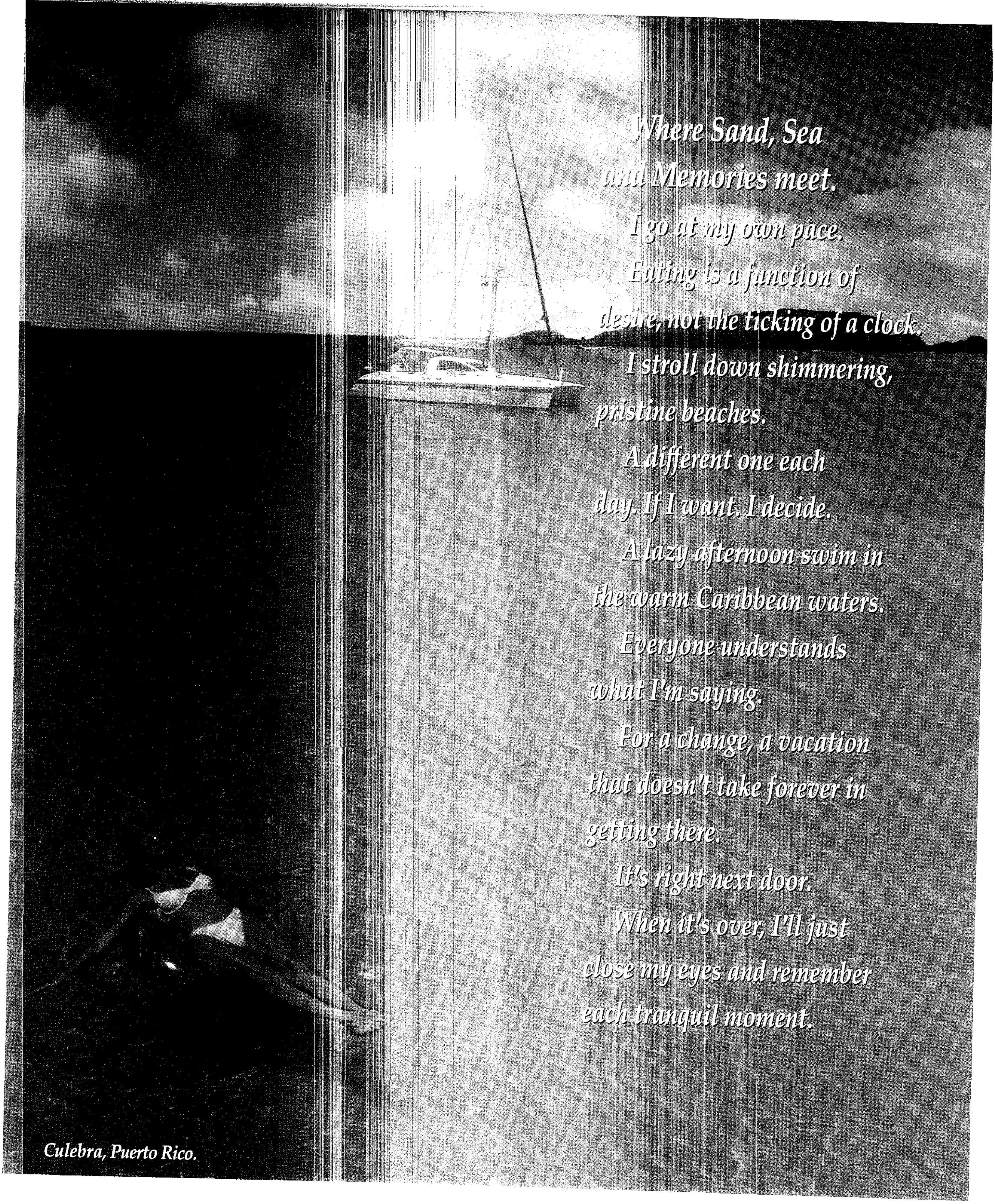
St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble—Offering a bit of everything: Mozart's Oboe Quartet, Hindemith's "Abendkonzert No. 4," Beethoven's Clarinet Trio, Ravel's "Chansons Madécasses" (with baritone William Sharp and pianist Todd Crow), and Arensky's String Quartet No. 2. (Weill Recital Hall. Feb. 5 at 8.)

Anthony Newman—Organist, in a wide-ranging recital that includes Bach's C-Minor Passacaglia and Fugue, several of Mr. Newman's own works (including a première), and music by Messiaen, Gigout, and Vierne. (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 288-2520. Feb. 5 at 8.)

Helvet' Quartet—The members of this cleverly named and oddly constituted Swiss foursome—trumpet, flute, double-bass, and piano—include music by their countrymen Honegger, Martin, and Schoeck in their program. (Swiss Institute, 495 Broadway, at Spring St. Feb. 6 at 7. No tickets necessary.)

Bargemusic—Presenting Prokofiev's Sonata for Two Violins, Kodály's String Trio, and Shostakovich's Piano Quintet. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. Feb. 6 at 7:30 and Feb. 9 at 4.)

Los Angeles Guitar Quartet—Performing works by Andrew York, Bryan Johanson, and Leo Brouwer, among others. (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. 749-2802, ext. 494. Feb. 6 at 8.)



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Marilyn Horne—The mezzo-soprano offers a recital of songs by Schubert, Wolf, Bernstein, and many others; with pianist Martin Katz. (Carnegie Hall. Feb. 7 at 7:30.)

Ensemble Wien—Substitute a double-bass for the cello in the standard string quartet and you have what is sometimes called a "divertimento quartet," the grouping often used for light string music in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Vienna. The Ensemble Wien carries on the tradition, offering, in this concert, morsels by Mozart, Schubert, Lanner, and three Strausses—Johann, Sr., and his sons Johann, Jr., and Josef. (Weill Recital Hall. Feb. 7 at 8.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center—Most of the many chamber works written by the young Mahler were lost or destroyed, but after the death of his widow, Alma, his manuscript of an incomplete A-Minor Piano Quartet, from between 1875 and 1878, turned up among her possessions. It had only a finished first movement and a fragmentary scherzo. In the nineteen-eighties the composer Alfred Schnittke expanded the scherzo's material into a complete second movement. Members of the society (with violist Tabea Zimmermann as a guest) play both movements in these concerts; also on the program are Schoenberg's String Trio and Strauss's C-Minor Piano Quartet (composed in the decade following Mahler's). (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 7 at 8 and Feb. 9 at 5.)

On Your Marks—Although the triennial Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, America's most prestigious, won't convene until late May, the preliminaries have already begun. Since mid-January, young musicians in Utrecht, Milan, and Moscow have been showing up for screening auditions, and this week the pre-competition reaches New York: for six days, aspiring pianists will take to the stage for forty-minute recitals before a jury. It's hard to play one's heart out to an empty house, so these young performers would love for you to cheer them on; and come June 8, when the victor in Fort Worth is announced, you might be able to brag that you heard the winner "back when." (Caspary Auditorium, Rockefeller University, York Ave. at 66th St. Feb. 8-13, from noon to 2:40 and from 8 to 11. No tickets necessary.)

Guarneri Quartet—Performing Beethoven's String Quartets in C Minor (Op. 18, No. 4), E Minor (Op. 59, No. 2), and F Major (Op. 135). (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Feb. 8 at 8.)

Jean-Pierre Rampal—The flutist performs sonatas by Poulenc, Franck, and David Diamond, as well as chamber works by Devienne and Bernstein (with several colleagues assisting). (92nd Street Y. Feb. 8 at 8.).

Ensemble for Early Music—These days, you won't find a lot of folks rolling back the rug to kick up their heels in an *istanpitta*. In fourteenth-century Italy, however, it seems to have been a dance of at least modest popularity, as was its slightly earlier French cousin, the *estampie*. The music was usually improvised, though, with the result that fewer than fifty notated examples have come down to us. All we have are the buoyant melodies, and performers have been known to exercise considerable fantasy in emphasizing their rhythms and filling out their texture. In this concert, percussionist Glen Velez will assist the early-music specialists in what promises to be infectious renditions. (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. Feb. 8 at 8 and Feb. 9 at 3. For information about tickets, call 749-6600.)

Tribute to Takemitsu—Though as a composer he was largely self-taught, Toru Takemitsu (who died just a year ago) became the most eminent ambassador between the musical cultures of the East and the West. He came of age when European and American musical values were centered on musique concrète, violent dissonance, and the destruction of traditional harmony, and his early compositions bear witness to those influences. But it was the study of Asian traditional music—principally from his native Japan, but also from China, Korea, Indonesia, and India—which led him toward the style his name immediately evokes: an East-West fusion in which resonance, silence, and serenity all play prominent parts. This weekend's concerts, sponsored by Music from Japan, trace the trajectory of his career. Feb. 8 at 8: Six of the composer's early works, including "Litany" and "Water Music," as well as a new piece by Joji Yuasa, written in Takemitsu's memory. . . . ¶ Feb. 9 at 8: Eight works from the composer's final fifteen years, plus the première of a piece by Lukas Foss. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330.)

The music of Toru Takemitsu, at Merkin Concert Hall.

GEOFFREY PARKER

Emerson String Quartet—The foursome plays Beethoven's Quartets in C Minor (Op. 18, No. 4) and E Minor (Op. 59, No. 2), as well as Ravel's String Quartet and Stravinsky's Three Pieces for String Quartet. (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 9 at 2.)

Lionheart—The vocal ensemble presents secular works from twelfth-century Paris. (Cloisters, Fort Tryon Park. 650-2290. Feb. 9 at 3.)

Arnaldo Cohen—Pianist, performing works by two of his Brazilian compatriots—Villa-Lobos and Lorenzo Fernândez—in addition to pieces by Haydn, Schoenberg, Brahms (his "Handel Variations"), and Liszt. (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. Feb. 9 at 5.)

Anner Bylsma—The cellist offers Bach's Unaccompanied Cello Suites No. 1, No. 3, and No. 5. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. Feb. 10 at 7:30. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.)

Orion String Quartet—Performing works by Schubert (his C-Minor Quartettsatz and G-Major Quartet, D. 887) and Brahms (his String Quartet No. 3). (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 11 at 7:30.)

Russell Sherman—The pianist's annual recital includes Beethoven's F-Minor Sonata (Op. 57, the "Appassionata"), Liszt's B-Minor Sonata, George Perle's "Six Celebratory Inventions," and Ralph Shapey's "Sonata Profondo." (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Feb. 11 at 8.)

Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio—The ensemble plays piano trios by Brahms (his First) and Tchaikovsky. (92nd Street Y. Feb. 11-12 at 8.)

ALSO OF INTEREST

New Music Consort: An electro-acoustic encounter. (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. 749-2802, ext. 494. Feb. 5 at 8.) . . . **New York Metamorphoses Orchestra.** (Masonic Hall, 71 W. 23rd St. Feb. 9 at 3. Tickets at the door.) . . . **Woodley Ensemble:** A chamber chorus. (92nd Street Y. Feb. 9 at 3.) . . . **Maria Ahn:** Cellist. (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. Feb. 9 at 6 and 8. No tickets necessary.) . . . **Galatea Ensemble.** (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. Feb. 10 at 8. Tickets at the door.) . . . **Chin Kim:** Violinist. (Mannes College of Music, 150 W. 85th St. Feb. 10 at 8. No tickets necessary.) . . . **Nina Boesen:** Violinist. (Mansfield Hotel, 12 W. 44th St. Feb. 10 at 8. No tickets necessary.) . . . **Katya Grineva:** Pianist. (Weill Recital Hall. Feb. 11 at 8.) . . . **Trio di Milano.** (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Feb. 11 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Round and Round—More than sixty Olympians are set to compete in the ninetieth edition of the Chase Millrose Games at Madison Square Garden on Friday. Gail Devers faces Gwen Torrence in the women's sixty metres; Derrick Adkins battles Anthuan Maybank in the five hundred metres; Allen Johnson squares off against Roger Kingdom in the sixty-metre hurdles. But the biggest news is the return of Mary Decker Slaney, who in 1974 was dubbed "the sweetheart of the Millrose Games" when, as a pigtailed fifteen-year-old, she won the one thousand yards. In 1980 she set a world indoor record in the fifteen hundred metres. She's back this time to run the mile, an event in which she holds the U.S. indoor and outdoor records. (465-6741. Feb. 7 at 5:45.)

Regnant Paws—Twenty-five hundred canines ("all the Garden can hold," according to the organizers), representing the entirety of the hundred and fifty-two breeds certified by the American Kennel Club, compete for the crown of best dog, at the annual Westminster Kennel Club dog show. (Madison Square Garden. 465-6741. Feb. 10-11.)

Year of the Ox—Events around the city mark the Chinese New Year. Feb. 8 at 11:30 A.M.: Traditional lion dancers hold court at the China Institute. (125 E. 65th St. 744-8181.) . . . ¶ Feb. 9 at 2: The Lunar New Year Folk Arts Festival, with music, Chinese delicacies, fortune-telling, and demonstrations of Tibetan tanka painting and Indian *mehendi* hand painting. (Asian American Arts Centre, 26 Bowery, at Bayard St. 233-2154.)

Readings—Feb. 5 at 7:30: Walter Mosely reads from "Gone Fishin'," the just-published Easy Rawlins novel, which he wrote in 1988. (Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, 85 S. Oxford St., Brooklyn. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Feb. 7 at 6:30: Belfast native Michael Longley reads from his latest book of poetry, "The Ghost Orchid." (American Irish Historical Society, Fifth Ave. at 80th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Feb. 10 at 8: Richard Ford goes mano a mano with Sam Shepard. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

Talks—Feb. 5 at 7:30: College students Katherine Mack, Sarah Potter, and Ciara Wilson discuss their experiences during the summer of 1996, when they hit the road as volunteers for the A.F.L.-C.I.O. (Brecht Forum, 122 W. 27th St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ Feb. 11 at 6: Former United States Senator Bill Bradley offers his take on the political life. (Celeste Bartos Forum, New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. Tickets at the door.)

Walks—Feb. 8 at 11: Freemason Steven S. Grant leads a Municipal Art Society tour of the newly refurbished Masonic Hall, on West 23rd Street. (For reservations, which are required, call 935-3960.) . . . ¶ Feb. 9 at 2: Grady Turner and Cynthia Copeland, curators of the New-York Historical Society's exhibition on Seneca Village (see Museums), offer a tour of what was once the site of that nineteenth-century African-American and Irish settlement, Central Park. (873-3400.)

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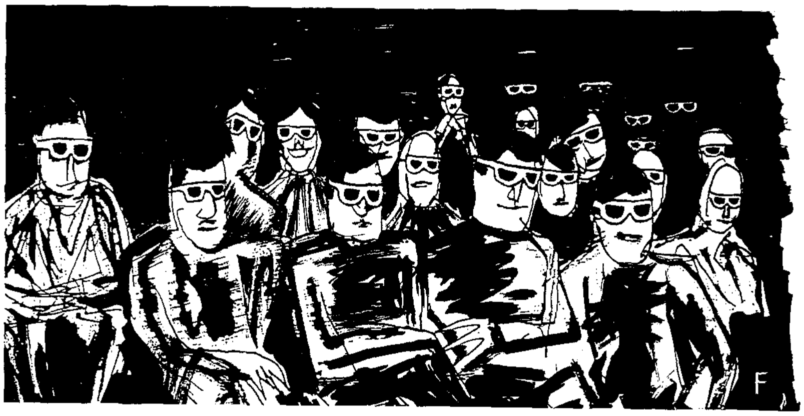


THE MOVIES

FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

The Beautician and the Beast—A romantic comedy in which Fran Drescher plays a Queens cosmetologist who aspires to a better life. Also starring Timothy Dalton. Directed by Ken Kwapis. Opening Feb. 7. (East 85th Street, Embassy 1, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.)

Dante's Peak—Pierce Brosnan and Linda Hamilton star in Roger Donaldson's movie about a volcanic eruption in the Pacific Northwest. Opening Feb. 7. (Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet, 84th Street Sixplex, National Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Showplace, and Waverly.)

Farmer & Chase—Lara Flynn Boyle comes between the father-and-son criminal team of Ben Gazzara and Todd Field, in a thriller directed by Michael Seitzman. Opening Feb. 7. (Village East Cinemas.)

Margaret's Museum—A film based on Sheldon Currie's short stories about life and love during the late forties in a Nova Scotia mining town. With Helena Bonham Carter, Kate Nelligan, and Clive Russell. Co-written (with Gerald Wexler) and directed by Mort Ransen. Opening Feb. 7. (Quad Cinema.)

The Pest—John Leguizamo is a con man of many disguises, in a comedy directed by Paul Miller, from a screenplay by David Bar Katz. Opening Feb. 7. (Criterion Center and 84th Street Sixplex.)

Suburbia—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Feb. 7. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, and Terrence Rafferty. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre information is listed on page 26.)

Albino Alligator—In Kevin Spacey's directorial début, a trio of fleeing bank robbers (Matt Dillon, Gary Sinise, and William Fichtner) invades a bar and makes hostages of the patrons. (Angelika Film Center. . . . ¶ Coronet; through Feb. 6.)

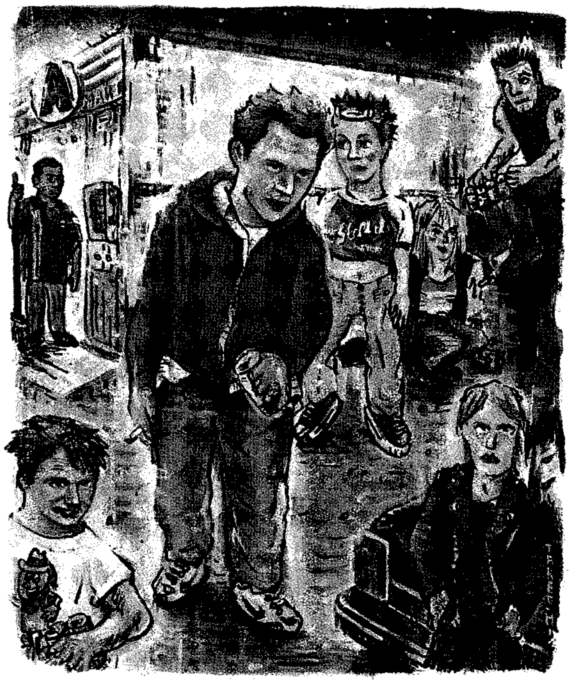
Angel Baby—Australian writer-director Michael Rymer's début film, about a mentally ill couple (John Lynch and Jacqueline McKenzie) who meet at group therapy and fall in love. (Carnegie Hall Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

Beverly Hills Ninja—Chris Farley is an orphan discovered by a Japanese martial-arts master and raised as his successor, in a comedy directed by Dennis Dugan. (Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, 64th and 2nd, and 34th Street Showplace.)

Big Night—The actor Stanley Tucci co-wrote (with Joseph Tropiano), co-directed (with Campbell Scott), and co-stars (with Tony Shalhoub) in this elegant, leisurely low-budget comedy about a struggling Italian restaurant run by a pair of immigrant brothers. The unusually happy, relaxed ensemble includes Ian Holm, Isabella Rossellini, Minnie Driver, Allison Janney, and Campbell Scott. The big set piece—a lavish dinner in honor of the singer-bandleader Louis Prima—is a fitting climax to the movie's patient accumulation of savory and blissfully pointless delights: a convincing illustration of how keen pleasure for pleasure's sake can be.—T.R. (9/23/96) (Cinema 3.)

Breaking the Waves—The Danish director Lars von Trier tells the sad story of a devout young Scottish woman (Emily Watson) who becomes a whore in order to save the life of her critically ill husband (Stellan Skarsgård). Von Trier gives the highbrow audience precisely what it wanted in the art-house boom years of the fifties and early sixties—nudity plus theology. The erotic-metaphysical hokum would be somewhat easier to take if the picture displayed anything resembling a genuine religious impulse.—T.R. (11/18/96) (Angelika Film Center and Eastside Playhouse.)

La Cérémonie—Jean-Pierre Cassel and Jacqueline Bisset hire the taciturn Sandrine Bonnaire as their new maid; she teams up with the local postmistress (Isabelle Huppert), and together they work themselves into a malignant fury. Director Claude Chabrol's skill is not in doubt here, but his film, adapted from a Ruth



Opening Feb. 7, Richard Linklater's "Suburbia."

TAKESHI TADATSU

Rendell novel, is surprisingly weak on motive and continuity. In French.—A.L. (1/20/97) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

The Crucible—Nicholas Hytner's florid, hyperbolic film of Arthur Miller's 1953 drama, about the Salem witchcraft trials, reveals the play as a characteristic product of its time—not so much in its anti-McCarthyism as in its sexual politics. The themes that come through most clearly here are fear of women and hatred of youth: the teen-age girls of Salem squeal and writhe, and the hero, John Proctor (Daniel Day-Lewis)—the manliest man in the colonies—swings from the gallows. Also with Winona Ryder, Paul Scofield, Joan Allen, and Bruce Davison.—T.R. (12/2/96) (Baronet.)

The English Patient—Written and directed by Anthony Minghella, from the novel by Michael Ondaatje, this long and searching movie tangles together a number of stories and characters: Almásy (Ralph Fiennes) and Katharine (Kristin Scott Thomas), who have an affair in North Africa before the Second World War; a French-Canadian nurse (Juliette Binoche) who cares for the badly burned Almásy after the war, and the Sikh soldier (Naveen Andrews) *she* has an affair with; and the mysterious Caravaggio (Willem Dafoe), a scavenging thief who appears to know the secrets of Almásy's past. The triumph of the film lies not just in the force and range of the performances but in Minghella's creation of an intimate epic: vast landscapes mingle with the minute details of desire, and the combination is transfixing.—A.L. (11/25/96) (Chelsea Cinemas, Embassy 3, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, New York Twin, and Village East Cinemas.)

Everyone Says I Love You—Woody Allen's latest movie is one of his frothiest, and weirdest, to date: a throwback picture that tries to resurrect the spirit of thirties musicals without recourse to irony. There is a deliberate roughness to both the singing (which is kind of charming) and the choreography (which is unwieldy and a little graceless). The all-star cast includes Julia Roberts, Tim Roth, Drew Barrymore, and Alan Alda. You emerge bemused but undeniably cheered up, partly because of the uncomplicated magic of the climax, in which Allen dances with an airborne Goldie Hawn on the bank of the Seine.—A.L. (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th St. East, and Village East Cinemas.)

Evita—At last, the rock opera by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice comes to the screen. The problem is that it remains a rock opera by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. The fact that it's almost bereft of spoken dialogue is good news for Madonna, who, as Eva Perón, is barely required to speak or even to act. Jonathan Pryce is a sly and troubled Juan Perón, and Antonio Banderas prowls through the action as our friendly smoldering narrator. Alan Parker's picture blares and blazes at you without letup, and it works best when it's openly theatrical—only when it's over do you sense how little lay beneath the busy surface.—A.L. (1/6/97) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema II, 86th Street East Twin, Guild, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII.)

Fierce Creatures—The cast of "A Fish Called Wanda" in a movie about a small English zoo swallowed up by a grand corporation. John Cleese is the new boss, who at first appears to be a nasty piece of work but is soon revealed in kinder colors; the villains, a crass Australian tycoon and his wretched son, are both played by Kevin Kline; and Jamie Lee Curtis has a curious role that reduces her to almost nothing but her bosom. Everything about the film feels so musty and antique—flatulence, underwear, gorillas—that you can't even work up the energy to be offended. It was directed by Robert Young *and* Fred Schepisi, who together make a handsome hash of things: characters float through with only the flimsiest gestures toward continuity, and Cleese is never allowed to let rip. The plot depends on a plan to market the fluffiest creatures in the zoo as untamed flesh-eaters, which seems horribly apposite: this is a picture that dreams of comic bite but has no teeth.—A.L. (2/3/97) (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, National Twin, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and 34th Street Showplace.)

Gridlock'd—Two drug-addicted Detroit performance artists (Tim Roth and the late Tupac Shakur) try to kick the habit, in a comedy written and directed by Vondie Curtis Hall. Also with Thandie Newton. (Astor Plaza, 84th Street Sixplex, Manhattan Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

Hamlet—Kenneth Branagh's film uses the full text of the play (the running time is nearly four hours), it's shot in 70 mm., and the approach is daringly straightforward. The director himself plays the unhappy Prince, and so lucidly that every shift in the volatile character's mood seems perfectly natural. Derek Jacobi, as Claudius, and Julie Christie, as Gertrude, are also superb. Also with Richard Briers (Polonius) and Kate Winslet (Ophelia).—T.R. (1/13/97) (Paris.)

In Love and War—Richard Attenborough's dopey epic follows the young Ernest Hemingway (Chris O'Donnell) as he fights and flirts his way around Northern Italy at the end of the First World War. Wounded in the course of heroic action at the front, he wakes up to find himself being tended by Agnes (Sandra Bullock); they embark on a love affair so intense and passionate that the audience soon slips under the ether, never to emerge. The film yearns after grandeur but stumbles around in circles under hazy light. None of the actors take hold, and Attenborough fails to recapture the severe mood of doomed and determined love which lent such punch to his 1993 "Shadowlands." The picture's only hope is that the miscasting may yet give it cult status. If O'Donnell can play Hemingway, what are the odds on Whoopi Goldberg's showing us the funny side of Emily Dickinson?—A.L. (2/3/97) (Criterion Center, Gotham Cinema, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

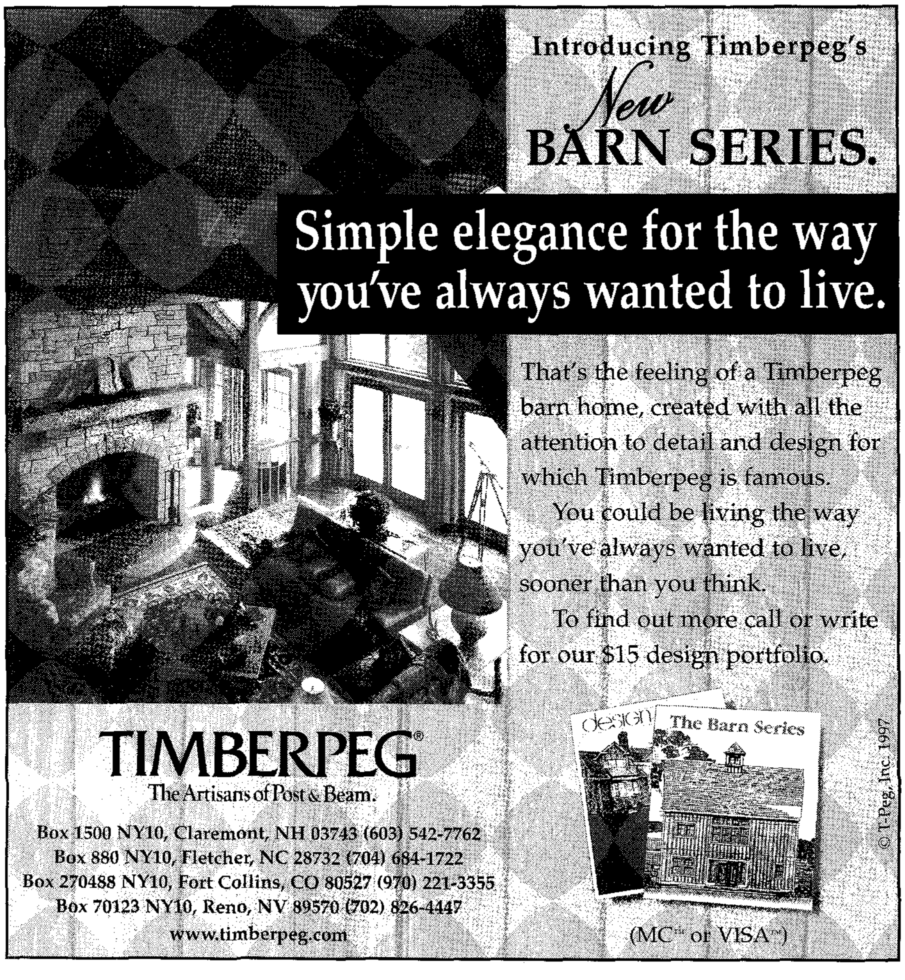
Jackie Chan's First Strike—A middling Jackie Chan feature, hilariously edited down from its original Hong Kong release and poorly dubbed. The truncated story is impossible to follow, yet Chan's sensationally choreographed fights still ring with humor, and there are some spectacular stunts.—B.D. (84th Street Sixplex, State, and Village East Cinemas.)

Jerry Maguire—Tom Cruise plays the title character, who is a glib, cocky agent for professional athletes. In the fluid opening scenes, the movie, which was written and directed by Cameron Crowe, promises to be something unusual—a comedy about the spiritual crisis of a shallow man. But the star quickly reverts to his familiar feisty, can-do shtick, and Crowe loses control of the fragile comic tone. Also with Renée Zellweger, Cuba Gooding, Jr., and Bonnie Hunt.—T.R. (12/16/96) (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.)

Johns—One December day in the life of two Hollywood street hustlers (Lukas Haas and David Arquette). Written and directed by Scott Silver. (Carnegie Hall Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

Kolya—The events following an arranged marriage leave an impecunious cellist (Zdenek Sverak) without his wife but with her six-year-old son (Andrej Chalimon). Directed by Jan Sverak. In Czech. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Marvin's Room—Jerry Zaks's strength-through-illness drama, adapted by the late Scott McPherson from his 1990 play. Bessie (Diane Keaton), who spends her time caring for her bedridden father (Hume Cronyn), discovers that she herself has leukemia; the search for a bone-marrow donor leads her to her sister, Lee (Meryl Streep), whom she hasn't seen in twenty years. Both women give it all they've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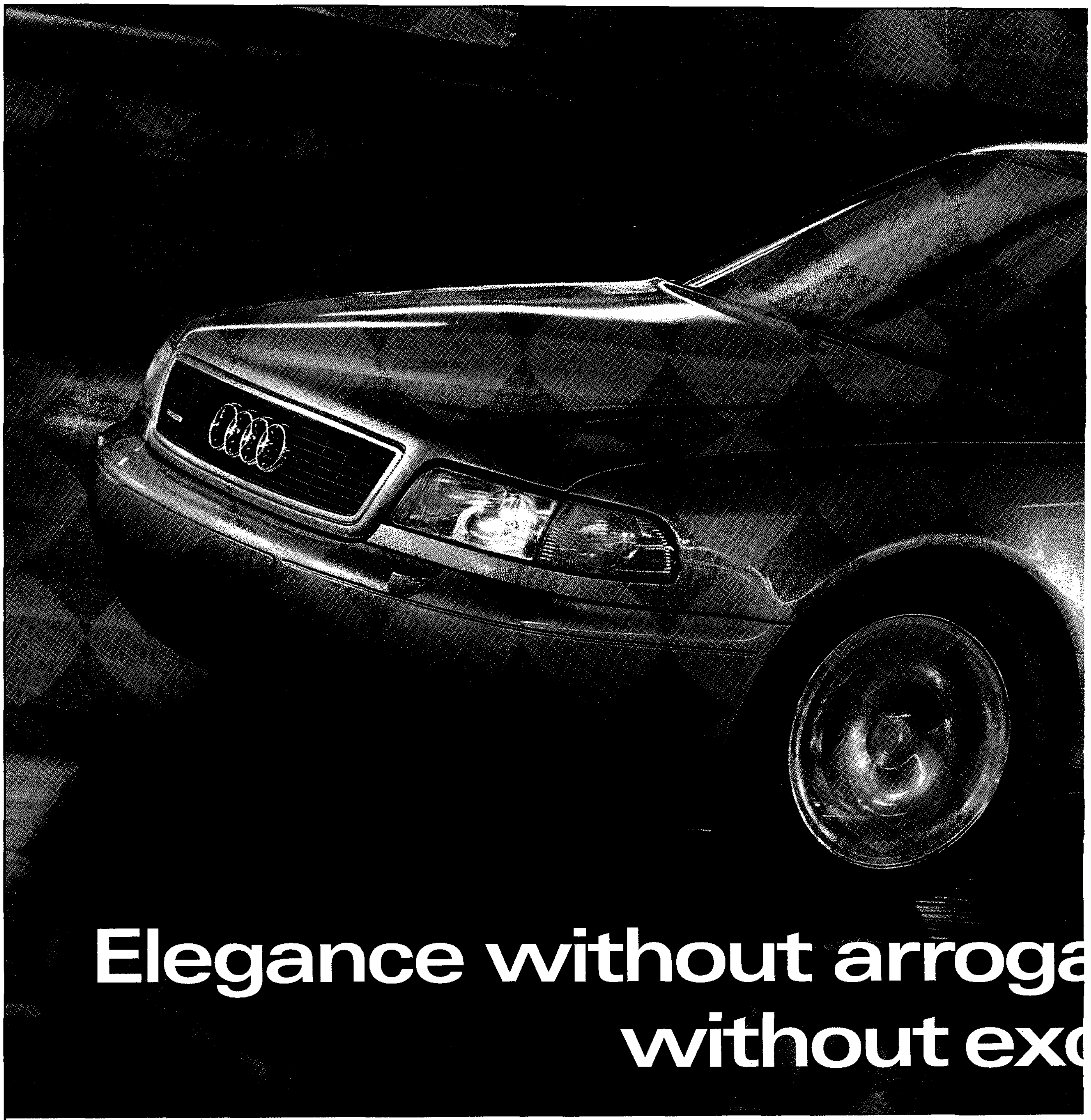

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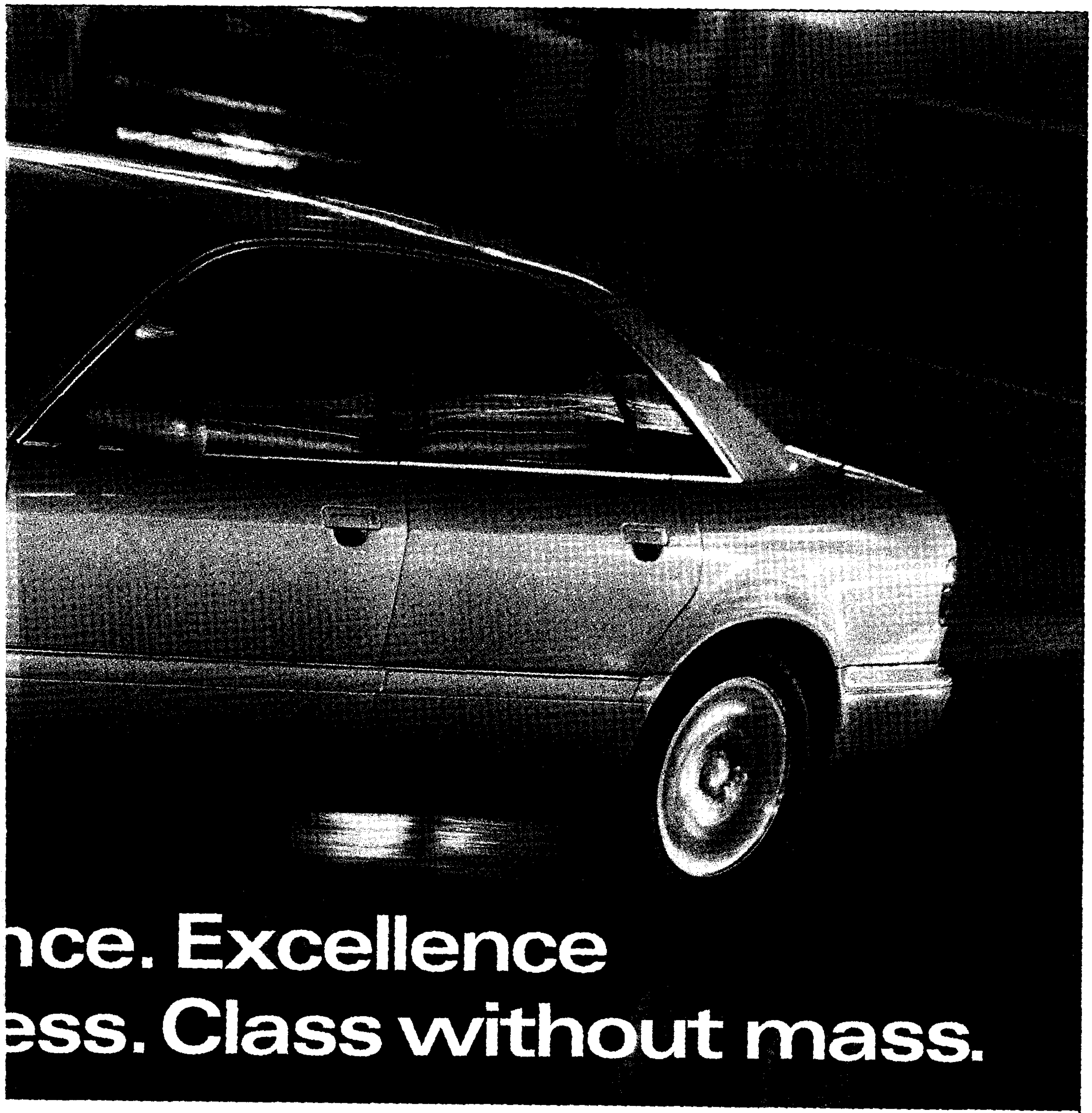

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got, but this cloying film doesn't deserve their generosity. Leonardo DiCaprio is highly convincing as Lee's dysfunctional son.—A.L. (1/20/97) (19th Street East 6, Regency, 68th St. Playhouse, and Village East Cinemas.)

Meet Wally Sparks—Rodney Dangerfield stars as a TV-talk-show host, in a comedy that he wrote with Harry Basil. Peter Baldwin is the director. (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

Metro—Eddie Murphy stars as an arbitrator for the San Francisco Police Department, in a thriller directed by Thomas Carter. (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Orpheum VII, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas. . . . ¶ Embassy 1; through Feb. 6. . . . ¶ Embassy 4; starting Feb. 7.)

Michael—Holiday candy from Nora Ephron, about a cynical tabloid reporter (William Hurt) who goes to Iowa to cover a story about an angel (John Travolta); it pointlessly reheats half a dozen old screwball and sentimental plots. The one new joke is that this angel is no halo-wearing, harp-strumming innocent: he specializes in fighting and sex. Travolta throws himself into it, but the script is so vulgar and sophomoric that it makes him look like an over-eager first-time actor. Andie MacDowell is the love interest.—S.K. (Beekman and Criterion Center.)

Mother—Albert Brooks directed, co-wrote (with Monica Johnson), and stars in this comedy, about a writer who's had problems with women and moves back in with his befuddled mother (Debbie Reynolds) in order to discover where he went wrong. The film flounders around trying to make tired points; Brooks gets his fair share of funny asides, but he goes beyond his usual subversive whininess into mean-spirited crankiness—and a lack of generosity is fatal for a comedy that's meant to charm.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII. . . . ¶ East 85th Street; through Feb. 6.)

The People vs. Larry Flynt—Milos Forman's film chronicles the sexual adventures, medical travails, and legal battles of Larry Flynt (Woody Harrelson)—the creator of the unprecedentedly crude skin magazine *Hustler*—and his raunchy wife, Althea (Courtney Love). For an hour or so, it's a cheerful and unpretentious picaresque comedy, but it turns sentimental and smugly high-minded in its second half: having gone to great lengths to humanize its disreputable hero and heroine, the movie then makes the mistake of trying to canonize them.—T.R. (1/13/97) (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Portrait of a Lady—Henry James's most celebrated novel has become, under the guidance of director Jane Campion and screenwriter Laura Jones, an intense and lengthy monotone. Isabel Archer (Nicole Kidman) arrives in a sombre, repressive England, then travels to an Italy that's not much better; there she marries Gilbert Osmond (John Malkovich), even though anyone in the audience could tell her to steer clear. With Martin Donovan as Ralph Touchett and Barbara Hershey, in what is easily the most potent performance in the picture, as the mysterious Madame Merle.—A.L. (1/6/97) (First & 62nd Cinemas and Village Theatre VII.)

Prisoner of the Mountains—A picture inspired by a Tolstoy story, about two Russian soldiers held for ransom by a rebel Muslim in the Caucasus. Sergei Bodrov directed. In Russian. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

The Relic—A strongly produced monster movie (by "Terminator" producer Gale Anne Hurd), with some swanky cinematography by its director, Peter Hyams. While the acting barely registers (Tom Sizemore and Penelope Ann Miller are the stars), the relentless pacing and the paint-by-numbers plot (a monster is loose in a Chicago natural-history museum) give the audience some no-brainer bang for its buck.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Metro Cinema, Orpheum VII, State, 34th Street Showplace, and Waverly.)

Saint Clara—A dark comedy written and directed by Ari Folman and Ori Sivan, in which an Israeli thirteen-year-old (Lucy Dubinchik) discovers that she has clairvoyant powers. In Hebrew. (Film Forum; through Feb. 11.)

Scream—An entertaining horror comedy in which the director Wes Craven and his scriptwriter, Kevin Williamson, take the clichés of fright films and reinvigorate them with a cheeky knowingness: the victims are horror-movie aficionados who in many instances make the same mistakes they've joked about seeing made on screen. With help from an unusually strong cast—Drew Barrymore, Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox, and David Arquette all do smashing work—Craven wrings some real thrills from the familiar perils of all those teen-age gorefests.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, State, and Waverly.)

Shadow Conspiracy—Charlie Sheen, Donald Sutherland, and Linda Hamilton star in George P. Cosmatos's political thriller. (84th Street Sixplex, 86th Street East Twin, Embassy 2, 19th Street East 6, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas.)

Shine—The hero of Scott Hicks's absorbing biographical film is the Australian concert pianist David Helfgott (played, at different stages of his life, by Alex Rafalowicz, Noah Taylor, and Geoffrey Rush), who suffered a severe breakdown, spent years in mental institutions, and then, improbably, resumed his career. Although the movie's swiftness and lightness are pleasing, the over-all image they create is indistinct: it just evaporates in your head when the lights come up. Also with Armin Mueller-Stahl, Lynn Redgrave, and John Gielgud (who's in especially buoyant comic form).—T.R. (12/2/96) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, Lincoln Square, and Murray Hill Cinemas.)

Some Mother's Son—Terry George's political docudrama tells the story of the hunger strike undertaken by Republican—mostly I.R.A.—prisoners in Northern Ireland's Maze (or Long Kesh) jail in 1981. Two of the protesters' mothers, played by Helen Mirren and Fionnula Flanagan, carry the burden of the drama: in their anguished impotence we see the human consequences of their sons' actions and of the British government's callous, intransigent reactions. The script, by the director and Jim Sheridan, is a little cavalier with the facts of the protest, and George's direction is just serviceable; but Mirren and Flanagan are terrific, and the movie, in its blunt, foursquare way, does manage to evoke the tragic insanity of the events. Also with Aidan Gillen and John Lynch.—T.R. (1/27/97) (Angelika Film Center.)

Thieves (Les Voleurs)—A thriller from André Téchiné, about a French policeman (Daniel Auteuil), his brother (Didier Bezace), the brother's mistress (Laurence Côte), and the mistress's lover (Catherine Deneuve). In French. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

Troublesome Creek: A Midwestern—A documentary about an Iowa family and the land they farmed for a hundred and twenty-five years. Written and directed by Jeanne Jordan (the daughter of the last owner) and her husband, Steven Ascher. (Angelika Film Center.)

Waiting for Guffman—If talent were enough, Christopher Guest's mock documentary about a small Missouri town celebrating its sesquicentennial would be one of the great recent comedies. Along with Guest, it stars such masterly offbeat character actors as Eugene Levy, Catherine O'Hara, and Bob Balaban, and it's full of quick gestures and throwaway lines that would be brilliant and memorable anywhere else. But satire at this length needs a fresher, fairer target than pathetic small-town piety. Guest and Levy, the co-writers, seem to have had nothing in mind beyond the kind of characters they could work up, and while *they're* clearly having fun, for us the result is something like watching children at play in a sandbox. And, without any check on their instincts, the actors often fall back on meanness; Guest's Corky St. Clair, the closeted but obviously gay high-school drama teacher, is a particularly tasteless (and dated) invention. With Parker Posey and Fred Willard.—S.K. (Cinema 3rd Avenue.)

ALSO PLAYING

BOUND: Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **CITIZEN RUTH:** Angelika 57 and The Screening Room. . . . **DAYLIGHT:** National Twin. . . . **101 DALMATIANS** (reviewed in our issue of 12/9/96): 86th Street East Twin. . . . **JINGLE ALL THE WAY:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE LONG KISS GOODNIGHT:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **LOOKING FOR RICHARD:** 59th Street East Cinema and Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **ONE FINE DAY:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **PREFONTAINE:** Sutton and Village East Cinemas. . . . **RIDICULE:** Angelika 57. . . . **SECRETS & LIES:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **SLING BLADE:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT** (12/9/96): Criterion Center. . . . **STAR WARS:** Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea West, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, and Ziegfeld. . . . **SWINGERS:** The Screening Room. . . . **TRAINSPOTTING** (7/22/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **TURBULENCE:** Criterion Center. . . . **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S ROMEO & JULIET:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **ZEUS AND ROXANNE:** Olympia.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th St.
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Baronet, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Carnegie Hall Cinemas, Seventh Ave. between 56th and 57th Sts.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St.
Coronet, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Embassy 1, Broadway at 46th St.
Embassy 2, 3, and 4, Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Manhattan Twin, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
National Twin, Broadway at 44th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St.
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
68th St. Playhouse, Third Ave. at 68th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th St. East, 241 E. 34th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

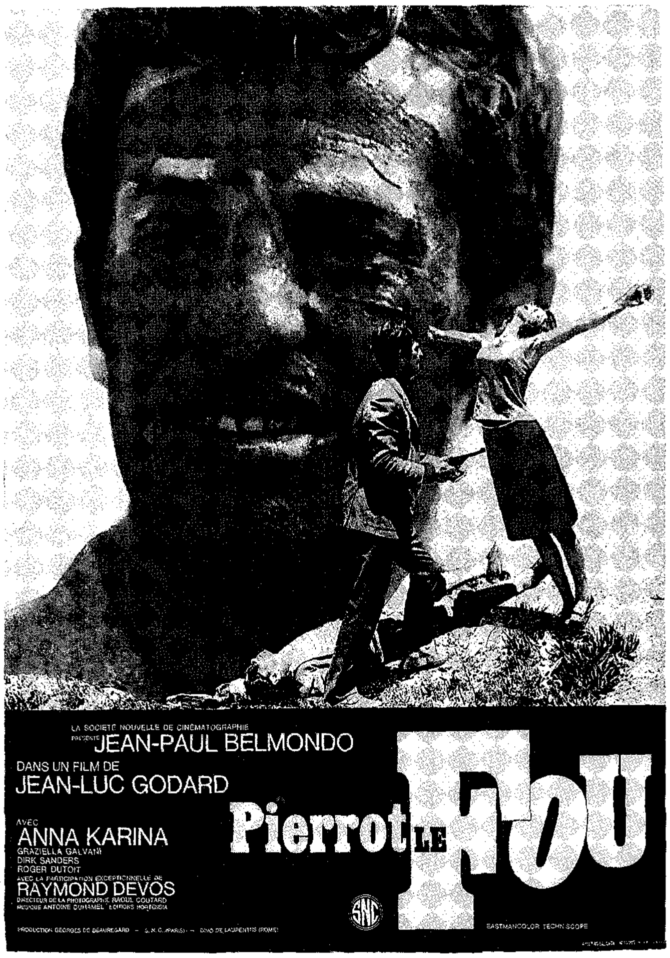
All That Heaven Allows (1955)—A trashy love story about the attraction between a natural man (Rock Hudson, as a New England tree surgeon) and a frustrated-by-respectability rich widow (Jane Wyman) who is some fifteen years older than he and has two grown children. Hudson and Wyman are hardly an electric combination, but this Ross Hunter production is made with so much symbolism that some people actually see it as allegorical. Its reputation derives from the slurpy, peculiarly glossy intensity of Douglas Sirk's direction; his blend of Germanic kitsch and Hollywood kitsch was a major influence on Rainer Werner Fassbinder.—P.K. (Museum of Modern Art; Feb. 9.)

Black Angel (1946)—Some psychological thrillers are just formula mysteries in highbrow disguise; this one, though, starts out as a routine whodunit and then gets deeper and stranger. June Vincent plays the wife of a man convicted of murdering a cold-blooded female blackmailer; Dan Duryea is the dead woman's alcoholic ex-husband, a pianist-songwriter still obsessed with her. As they team up to track down the real killer, the director, Roy William Neill, casually works in surprising snatches of atmosphere—there are good lowdown bits in a swank Sunset Strip bar run by an ex-con (Peter Lorre) and in a Hollywood café filled with movie extras. Lorre menaces away at his ambiguous best, with a steelier purr than usual; Broderick Crawford holds his bluster in check as a homicide cop. And Duryea proves equally game at dapperness and dipsomania. As the songwriter's two big hits (tellingly named "Heartbreak" and "Time Will Tell") linger in the air, the film develops the romantic ambience of a poor man's "Laura"; then it satisfyingly descends into the doomy dementia one expects from a movie based on a Cornell Woolrich story. Roy Chanslor did the adaptation.—M.S. (Film Forum 2; Feb. 11.)

Lady in the Lake (1947)—A Raymond Chandler murder mystery with the camera functioning as the Private Eye—that is, as the eyes of Philip Marlowe, the narrator-protagonist (Robert Montgomery), who is seen in his entirety only when his reflection is caught in mirrors. This novelty is a nuisance, and is frustrating besides, since Montgomery (who also directed) is the only star; the plot isn't involving enough to compensate for the absence of star byplay. At one point, the face of Audrey Totter, the feminine lead, comes swimming out at you, lips ajar, as if to honor you with a great big kiss; then she's lost in shadows. That's about as close as you get to any fun.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; Feb. 7-8.)

Pierrot le Fou (1965)—Jean-Luc Godard's unresolved, disturbing film: it gets to you. The narrative encompasses a satire of advertising, an existential stalemate, political violence, and romance, all shot—in color—in a hard-edge style. With Jean-Paul Belmondo as Ferdinand, who leaves his rich wife in Paris and goes off to the South of France with the restless Marianne (Anna Karina); he comes to an unforgettably explosive end. The cinematography is by Raoul Coutard. In French.—P.K. (Symphony Space; Feb. 11.)

Slightly Scarlet (1956)—Though it's shot in widescreen and color by the deft John Alton, this loose adaptation of James M. Cain's novel "Love's Lovely Counterfeit" ain't pretty: it's clumsy and plush in a mid-fifties back-lot manner, a bad combination for an underworld melodrama. John Payne plays the syndicate's house genius in a Central California coastal city who sabotages his boss and helps elect a reform mayor in order to seize control of the gambling racket for himself; along the way, he gets involved with both the mayor's secretary (Rhonda Fleming) and her sister (Arlene Dahl), a klepto-nymphomaniac. The only fun comes from watching Dahl play wacky-dangerous—shooting off a harpoon gun, posing with shoplifted pearls, stripping at the slightest excuse—but she doesn't have the oomph to transform this piece of curdled kitsch into camp. Allan Dwan directed, from a script by Robert Blees.—M.S. (Film Forum 2; Feb. 11.)


LA SOCIETE NOUVELLE DE CINÉMATOGRAPHIE
PRÉSENTE JEAN-PAUL BELMONDO
DANS UN FILM DE
JEAN-LUC GODARD
AVEC
ANNA KARINA
GRAZIELLA GALVANI
DIRK SANDERS
ROGER DUTOIT
AVEC LA PARTICIPATION EXCEPTIONNELLE DE
RAYMOND DEVOS
DIRECTEUR DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE RAOUL COUTARD
MUSIQUE ANTOINE DUHAMEL EDITIONS HORTENSIA
Pierrot LE FOU
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PRODUCTION GEORGES DE BEAUREGARD — S.N.C. (PARIS) — DINO DE LAURENTIIS (ROME)
EASTMANCOLOR TECHNISCOPE

The original poster for Jean-Luc Godard's "Pierrot le Fou."

COURTESY OF FABIANO CANOSA

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2 and 3, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—**Theatre 2:** A series of film noir based on novels by Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Cornell Woolrich (a.k.a. William Irish), and James M. Cain. Feb. 6: "Convicted" (1938, Leon Barsha), "Money and the Woman" (1940, William K. Howard), and "Gypsy Wildcat" (1944, Roy William Neill). . . . Feb. 7-8: "Murder, My Sweet" (1944, Edward Dmytryk) and "Lady in the Lake" (†). . . . Feb. 9: "The Bride Wore Black" (1968, François Truffaut; in French). . . . Feb. 10: "The Brasher Doubloon" (1947, John Brahm) and "The Falcon Takes Over" (1942, Irving Reis). . . . Feb. 11: "Slightly Scarlet" (†) and "Black Angel" (†). . . . **Theatre 3:** "The Big Sleep" (1945, Howard Hawks), with Humphrey Bogart, "Walkabout" (1971, Nicolas Roeg), and "Microcosmos" (1996, Claude Nuridsany and Marie Pérennou).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—A program of films by Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German, most with English subtitles. Feb. 6 at 2:30 and Feb. 10 at 6: "Martha" (1973). . . . Feb. 6 at 8:15: "The Coffeehouse" (1970). . . . Feb. 7 at 2:30 and Feb. 11 at 6: "Jail Bait" (1972). . . . Feb. 7 at 6:30 and Feb. 8 at 3: "World on a Wire" (1973). . . . Feb. 8 at 1: "Bremen Freedom" (1972). . . . Feb. 9 at 2: "Ali: Fear Eats the Soul" (1973). . . . Feb. 10 at 2:30: "Effi Briest" (1974). . . . Feb. 11 at 2:30: "Fear of Fear" (1975). . . . ¶ A selection of films admired by Fassbinder. Feb. 7 at 3 and Feb. 8 at 5: "The Servant" (1963, Joseph Losey). . . . Feb. 7 at 6 and Feb. 9 at 2:30: "Mother Krausens' Trip to Happiness" (1929, Piel Jutzi; a silent film, with German intertitles). . . . Feb. 7 at 8 and Feb. 8 at 2: "The Exterminating Angel" (1962, Luis Buñuel; in Spanish). . . . Feb. 9 at 5: "All That Heaven Allows" (†). . . . Feb. 9 at 5 and Feb. 11 at 3: "Zero for Conduct" (1932, Jean Vigo; in French) and "Un Chant d'Amour" (1950, Jean Genet). . . . ¶ Feb. 6 at 3 and 6: "Fat of the Land" (1995, Nicole Cousino, Sarah Lewison, Florence Dore, Julie Konop, and Gina Todus).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—A program of films by Charles Burnett. Feb. 5-6 at 2 and 4: "Bless Their Little Hearts" (1984, co-directed with Billy Woodberry). . . . Feb. 7 at 2, 4:15, and 6:30: "My Brother's Wedding" (1984). . . . Feb. 7 at 8:45, Feb. 8 at 6:15, Feb. 9 at 4:15, and Feb. 11 at 8:30: "Nightjohn" (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.). . . Feb. 8 at 4:15 and Feb. 9 at 8:30: "America Becoming" (1991, with Dai Sil Kim-Gibson). . . . Feb. 8 at 8:15 and Feb. 9 at 6:30: "To Sleep with Anger" (1990). . . . ¶ Feb. 8-9 at 2: "Time Bandits" (1981, Terry Gilliam). . . . ¶ Feb. 11 at 6: "Bleached" (1996, Tom Danon).

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Feb. 11 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Max, Mon Amour" (1986, Nagisa Oshima; in French).

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—A program of films directed by David Lynch. Feb. 8-9 at 2: "Blue Velvet" (1986). . . . Feb. 8-9 at 4:30: "Le Cowboy et le Frenchman" (1988) and "Industrial Symphony No. 1" (1990). . . . In the Nam June Paik Video Viewing Room, the episodes of "Twin Peaks" which Lynch himself directed are being shown. Through Feb. 7: Episode 2. . . . From Feb. 8: Episode 8.

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (864-5400)—Feb. 11 at 7: "Pierrot le Fou" (†). . . . Feb. 11 at 9: "Forty Guns" (1957, Samuel Fuller), with Barbara Stanwyck and Barry Sullivan.

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Feb. 6 at 6:30: "Boy" (1969, Nagisa Oshima; in Japanese). . . . ¶ A program of films by Vera Chytilová; in Czech, with English subtitles. Feb. 6 at 8:30: "The Ceiling" (1961) and "Prague" (1987). . . . Feb. 7 at 7: "Panel Story" (1979). . . . Feb. 8 at 7: "Wolf's Cabin" (1987). . . . Feb. 9 at 6: "The Apple Game" (1967). . . . ¶ Feb. 6 and Feb. 10 at 9: "Kiss of the Spider Woman" (1985, Hector Babenco). . . . ¶ A program of films by or about Andrei Tarkovsky. Feb. 7 at 8: "Nostalghia" (1983). . . . Feb. 8 at 6: "Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky" (1988, Michail Leszczylowski). . . Feb. 8 at 8: "Andrei Roublev" (1966). . . . Feb. 9 at 8: "The Mirror" (1974). . . . Feb. 10 at 8: "Solaris" (1972). . . . Feb. 11 at 8: "Stalker" (1979). . . . ¶ A program of films by Mike Leigh. Feb. 7 at 9: "Four Days in July" (1985). . . . Feb. 9 at 10: "Grown Ups" (1980). . . . ¶ Feb. 11 at 9: "Mouchette" (1966, Robert Bresson; in French).

Raymond Carver

Jamaica Kincaid

John Updike

Alice Adams

Woody Allen

Vladimir Nabokov

Alice Munro

John O'Hara

Mavis Gallant

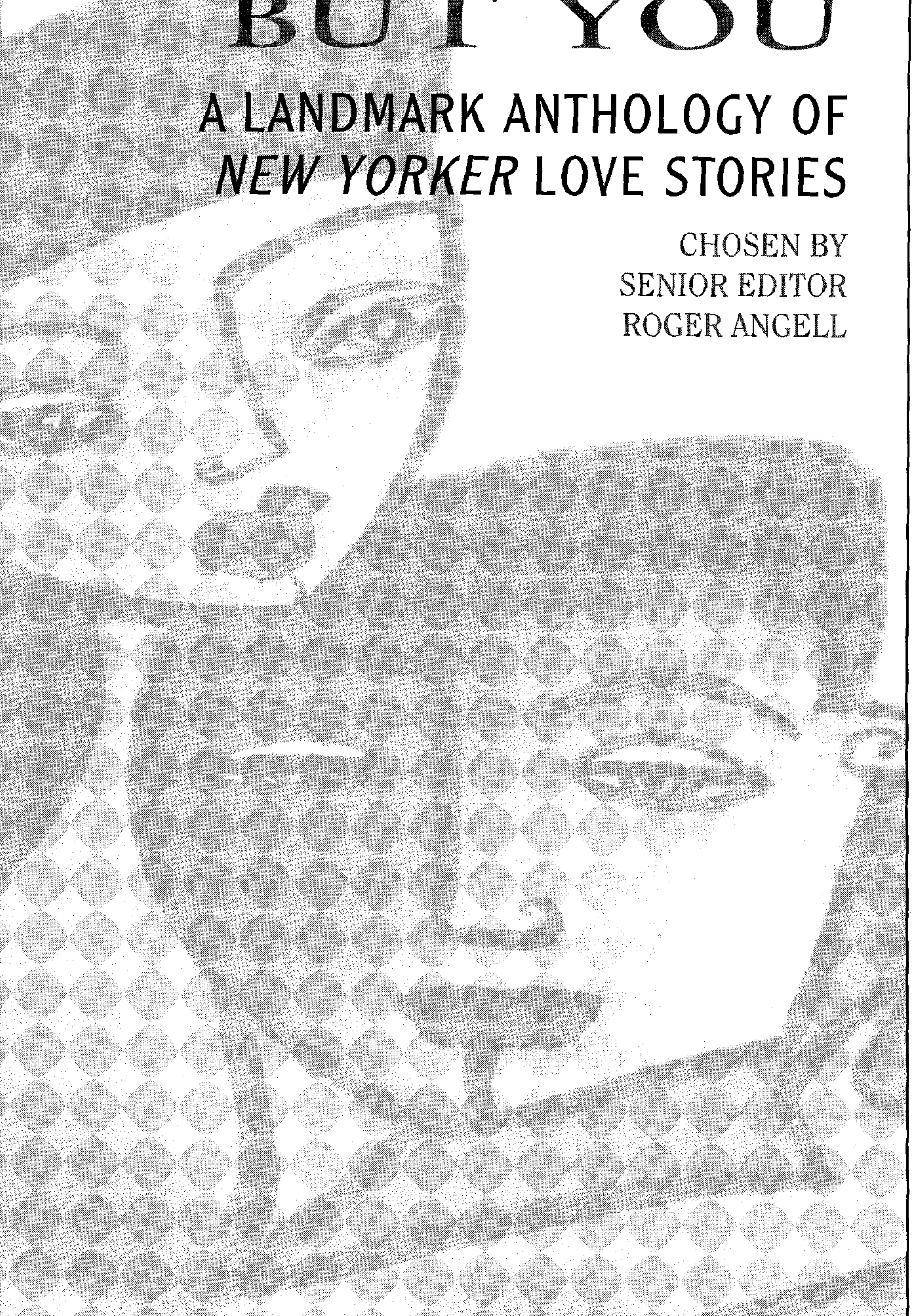
William Trevor

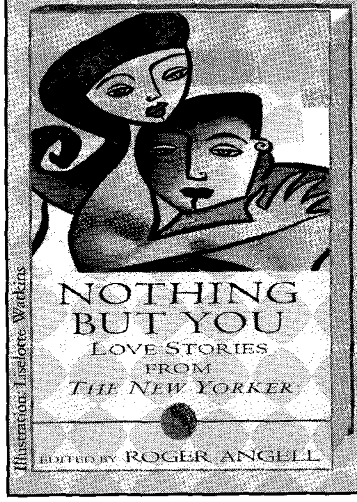
Gabriel Gárcia Márquez

NOTHING
BUT YOU

A LANDMARK ANTHOLOGY OF
NEW YORKER LOVE STORIES

CHOSEN BY
SENIOR EDITOR
ROGER ANGELL

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FROM
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EDITED BY ROGER ANGELL

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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

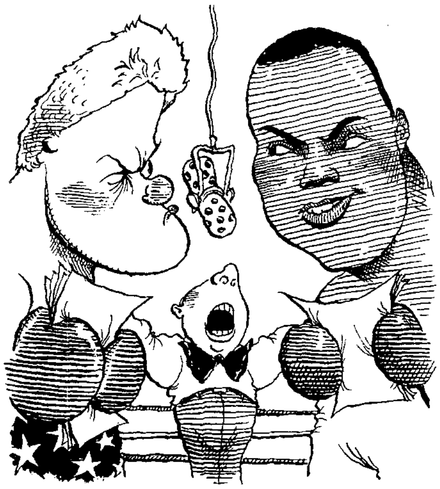
THE GREAT BLACK HOPE

CATCHING up with Julius Caesar Watts, Jr., was not easy last week. The personable congressman and former Oklahoma Sooner quarterback was in his home state, making round-the-clock calls on constituents while preparing to deliver the Republican reply to the President's State of the Union address this week. In Washington, the contest between a white Southerner who famously embraces all minorities and a black Southerner who espouses conservatism with powerful self-assurance is being touted as the first main event of the second Clinton Administration: Bubba Meets the Blues. In Oklahoma, however, the counterpuncher was insisting that his speech would be less a response to the President than his own, values-laden alternative vision for the twenty-first century.

The G.O.P.'s hope is that Watts will surpass the stirring speech he gave at the Republican Convention last summer, which was generally regarded as the highlight of an otherwise unremarkable event. His delivery was charismatic, and he showed a gift for the memorable phrase. ("We don't define compassion by how many people are on welfare but on how few.")

J. C. Watts, as he has been known since high school, is only the second black Republican elected to Congress since Reconstruction and the first from a former slave-holding territory. In the Choctaw language, Oklahoma means "red people," but Watts's great-grandparents moved into what was then called Indian Territory about 1897, a decade before statehood. Watts grew up, one of six children, in the small town of Eufaula, where his father farmed and succeeded in various small businesses. After his stellar years as a Sooner—he was twice named M.V.P. in the Orange Bowl—he had a brief pro career in Canadian football and became an investor in Oklahoma oil and gas, only to see that business collapse in the mid-eighties. He got into politics as a member of the powerful Oklahoma Corporation Commission, and ran successfully in 1994 for the House, where he became a strong supporter of the Republicans' "Contract with America." An estimated ninety-three per cent of his constituents are white. So what is a black Republican doing representing mostly whites, who are mostly registered Democrats, in a state whose Jim Crow laws were so severe that even the telephone booths were segregated?

"I've always felt that if somebody was bothered by the color of my skin, that was their problem," Watts said in the lobby of a Holiday Inn in Norman. A tall but not bulky man who will be forty later this year, he added, "People vote for me because I think the way they do—I don't care what color they are—and I want the same things for my family. Education. Freedom." Watts, who clearly disapproves of identity politics, would like to be known as something other than a *black* Republican. "The only reason I'm a Republican," he said, "is because the Democrats stopped believing in what I believe and what my parents and my uncle taught me. Self-reliance. The importance of the individual. Living your moral and ethical convictions. I mean religious values, and I'm not shy about them." The foundation of all ethical behavior, he said, is a belief in moral absolutes as definite as "Thou shalt not kill." "You can't always live up to them," he said, "but you have to believe in something."



Clinton vs. Watts

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL WITTE

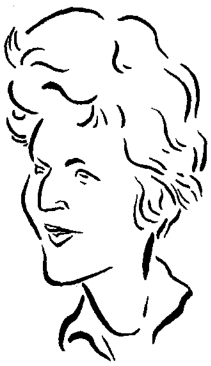
On the subject of affirmative action, Watts is equivocal. He doesn't like it, but he thinks some alternative, perhaps based on financial need, should be substituted, before all preferences, set-asides, and the like are abandoned. "I don't pretend it's a level playing field out there for everyone," he said. "I'm black, but I had the advantages of a close family and a big one, to help me up when I fell down." It was perhaps a reference to an illegitimate daughter whom he fathered as a teen-ager and who was adopted by his uncle, as well as to business liabilities he incurred in the eighties which have drawn political flak. "All the same," he continued, "if I were white I would not want a black guy or a Latina woman or what have you taking my job just because of their color or gender. That is completely unfair. We have to find a better way to help the needy. We have not found it yet, but we will."

Thinking about what he would say to a group of high-school students he was to address the next morning, Watts, who has six children of his own, remembered a commencement address he'd heard a few years before. "It really upset me when the valedictorian got up and said, 'Just because I'm the valedictorian, all it means is I got better grades than you-all, and that doesn't make me better than any of you,' " he recalled. "Can you believe that? I wanted to shout at her, 'Yes, you *are* better than they are!' Since when did mediocrity become the American standard? I'll tell you one thing: when one of my kids gets a three-point-six or a three-point-eight average, I sure do think she's better than the one getting a two-point! Well, that's one difference between me and the Democrats."

As Watts sees it, the Democrats have fallen into the trap of trying to show so much sympathy for the downtrodden that they've forgotten what it takes to escape being a victim. "My father," he said, "was always giving me these corny old sayings, when I'd complain about baling hay or tending cattle—you know, 'Life is not a bed of roses, son,' that kind of thing. I used to think he was just talking, but now I know he was right. But the Democrats just keep lowering the bar, so nobody has to try as hard. I just had to become a Republican. The Democrats don't have any use for my kind now. But they will again. They'll have to."

THE VICTORIAN GAME

MOLLIE PANTER-DOWNES, who died on January 22nd, at the age of ninety, was one of the most influential in the small band of journalists who, in the late thirties and early forties, transformed *The New Yorker's* absorption with the Dubuque-denying, lighthearted world of Manhattan into a recognition of the dark, dangerous world outside. No one could have seemed less likely for the role. She was a wonderfully clear writer, of course, but she was a fiction writer (she published her first novel when she was sixteen), and it was not until Katharine White, then the magazine's fiction editor, saw in her work the accurate eye of a natural reporter that she made the transition. There were other women in the band—Janet Flanner and Rebecca West were two—but Mollie was unique. A strikingly good-looking woman, with a tremendously patrician nose and startling blue eyes, she understood and played what Virginia Woolf called the Victorian game. "It is useful," Woolf wrote. "It has also its beauty, for it is founded upon restraint, sympathy, unselfishness—all civilized qualities." Behind Mollie's invariable good manners and politesse, however, there was a certain concealed diffidence. Rebecca West's magisterial intellectualism scared her half to death, and she didn't know what to make of Janet Flanner at all, though she envied her for her speed and dash as a writer, and for her worldliness. Mollie herself, in contrast, was a completely domesticated reporter, living in an Elizabethan house in Surrey with a husband, daughters, dogs, stacks and stacks of books, and a ravishing garden. She was, in short, thoroughly, bred-in-the-bone *English* (actually, Anglo-Irish, which is even more so), and it was this Englishness that gave her Letter from London such authority.

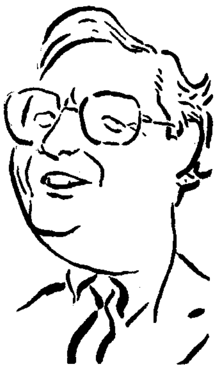


Mollie Panter-Downes

Mollie wrote her first Letter on September 3, 1939, two days after war was declared; on May 12, 1945, five days after V-E Day, she wrote her hundred and fifty-third. Other *New Yorker* correspondents were writing about the war, of course, often with great power and conviction, but they dealt with large incidents and events, while Mollie wrote of the quotidian stream of English life, of what it was like to actually live in a war: of what the government was doing, of the nervous sound of the air-raid sirens, of the disappearance of the egg, of children being evacuated—of all the things that made life in England bearable and unbearable. In a steady flow of copy, directed to editors she had never met at a magazine she had never visited, she undoubtedly did more to explain wartime England to American readers than anyone else in the field. She made such a name for herself during the war, in fact, that people tend to forget her brilliant coverage of London after the war. There was never anyone like her (except, possibly, Janet Flanner) for the telling, apposite observed detail, as she reported in her Letters on the London theatres and art galleries and museums, with side glances at London parks and royal weddings and civic architecture and political scandals and publishing-house doings and notable funerals. She also wrote long pieces, of which two—"Ooty Preserved," an account of the British-colonial hill station of Ootacamund, and "At the Pines," a study of Swinburne and Watts-Dunton—became books. She even found time to write another novel, "One Fine Day."

None of this production came easy. She was a slow, painstaking writer; the seamlessness of the finished product belied the effort that went into it. She had a little writing house on her place in Surrey, and every day she would shut herself up in it with her notes and gleanings to put together yet another of her lustrous constructions for her distant editors. Then, when the piece was finished and every comma in place, something close to farce would take over. A local boy on a rattletrap bicycle would wheel the copy over to the railroad station, if he didn't have a flat tire, and deliver it to a benign train conductor on the six-forty-three to London; this man, in turn, if he didn't forget, would trot it over to the cable office, and the people there, if they hadn't mislaid the address, would dispatch it to New York. Over the years, every one of these possible disasters took place, but, true to form, muddling through eventually prevailed. It is doubtful whether the boy on the bicycle, as he mended his flat, had the slightest idea of how much pleasure and humor and feeling he had in his basket. But we knew, and know, and are grateful.

THE SPOILER



Joel Gora

THE two hundred or so young show-biz types who gathered in a private room at Sardi's last week to participate in a forum on the need for campaign-finance reform applauded vigorously throughout a discussion that featured, among others, the Republican congressman Christopher Shays and the Democratic senator Russell Feingold, who are co-sponsors of bills to restrict donations from political-action committees, soft-money contributions, and "issue advertising." Things were about to break up in a spirit of high-minded urgency when the actor Alec Baldwin, who was hosting the event as president of a group of politically concerned theatre and movie people called The Creative Coalition, introduced a gentleman in jacket and tie who had been sitting quietly in the back of the room.

The man turned out to be Joel Gora, general counsel to the New York Civil Liberties Union. Leaning toward a C-SPAN microphone that had suddenly swung his way, he said, "What you're talking about is regulating people's right to express their opinion. Issue advertising is the core to the First Amendment. It's people running an ad in favor of campaign reform or against it, in favor of pro-choice or against it, or whatever the issue might be. . . . You limit that, you violate the First Amendment." After tartly reminding the assembled about the Constitution's protection of their activities—"I would think particularly that The Creative Coalition would be a little bit skeptical about the voluntary restraint on freedom of speech"—Gora sat down to a shuffling of chairs, and the evening soon came to an end.

The next day in his office at Brooklyn Law School, where he teaches constitutional law, Gora was eager to expand on his argument. A well-pedigreed opponent of campaign-finance reform, he served as a plaintiff lawyer in Buckley v. Valeo, the widely criticized 1976 decision in which the Supreme Court struck down many of the post-Watergate reforms, as violations of the First Amendment. Gora said that he and the A.C.L.U. wish the court had gone even further. "If you limit the amount of money you can spend on your message," he explained, "you've limited your ability to communicate the message itself." In his view, prohibiting individuals from giving more than a thousand dollars to candidates is "like saying you can't spend more than a thousand dollars to hand out handbills." He added that placing similar limits on PACs infringes the right of free association, since it restricts the ability to use collective action to amplify our voices.

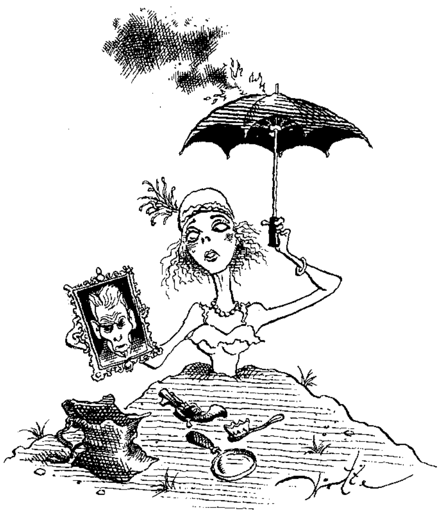
But doesn't the vast tide of special-interest money washing over politics send a message that the system is rigged against the little guy? "The problem," Gora said, "is that you can't limit everybody. All of the messages are out there, and you have to either limit them all, which would be a First Amendment meltdown, or limit some and not others, in which case you don't have parity." The A.C.L.U.'s proposed alternative to the current legislation, he said, is to build a "floor" rather than a "ceiling" to provide every legitimate candidate with enough public funding to wage a competitive campaign. "Nobody," Gora said, shedding his professorial manner for the moment, "is proposing *that* reform."

Gora pointed out that removing the cap on contributions would give insurgent candidates the chance to raise enough money to get their names before the public, as Eugene McCarthy did in 1968. Money, in other words, can be democratizing. The best safeguard against the potential for corruption, he said, is prompt disclosure of the money's source.

Gora went on to say that corporations should have the same rights of political expression as individuals, as should noncitizens. But what about those Asian nationals who poured millions into the Democratic Party's coffers? "We're living in a global village. How about free trade in ideas?" Well, then, why not foreign companies? "That's a different issue," Gora said, having reached what appeared to be the limits of his devotion to the First Amendment.

PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM

"A LOT of actors get very angry with Beckett," Billie Whitelaw said the morning after she had helped celebrate the late playwright's ninetieth birthday with a reading at the 92nd Street Y. "They say, 'He has no right to use you like this.' The flip answer I give is that most actors do at some point ruin their health, and I'd rather do it with Samuel Beckett than by snorting coke, or in the back seat of a car with Miss Divine Doo-Dah in Hollywood."



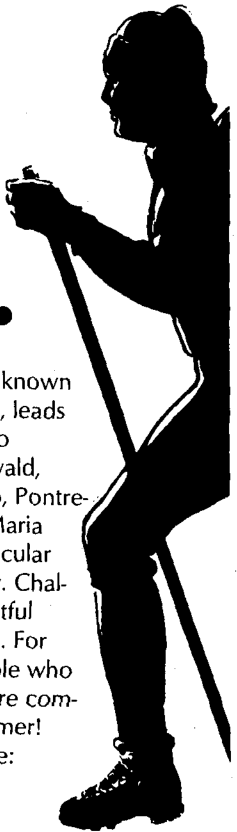
Billie Whitelaw

Whitelaw is renowned, of course, for having been the most willing, long-suffering muse in the modern theatre—the actress who was required to spend the evening trapped inside an urn (for "Play"); to be strapped to an executioner's chair (for "Not I"); and to be buried up to her neck in debris (for "Happy Days"). Nonetheless, she had only fond memories of "Sam," as she sat in the lobby of the Algonquin, sipping champagne and reminiscing in a voice dry as toast about the man who led her syllable by syllable through such lines as "Put on your hat now, Winnie, there is nothing else for it, take off your hat now, Winnie, like a good girl, it will do you good. . . ." A fragile-looking woman of sixty-four, she remembered Beckett as a gentle, handsome man who liked his whiskey and football, who brought Meccano sets for her son when he came to visit in London, and who preferred the company of people who were, as she put it, "slightly damaged." The playwright despised the press, she said, and had a particular horror of New York—adding that he might have been delighted with the Samuel Beckett Theatre, on West Forty-second Street: "It's like a coffin. That would have amused him. Those twinkly eyes."

"Sam was the most compassionate, caring soul," she said, pausing as if to correct herself. "I mean, for someone so kind he was obsessive, almost sadistic." She stopped again. "Oh, Lord, I shouldn't have said that. He wasn't sadistic at all. But his work meant more to him than anything else. And he didn't realize what he was doing to people on the other end." She tapped on the table. "Once he had finished with the pen, and the pencil, and this funny writing he had"—she scrawled furiously with her index finger on a napkin—"actually, he needed me. Because all it was, was stuff on paper. I gave it life." Why did Beckett choose Billie Whitelaw? "He used to say it was because I didn't ask a lot of damn-fool questions," she replied. In fact, the only question she could recall ever having directed to the playwright was during a rehearsal for "Footfalls": "I asked, 'Am I dead?' And he answered, 'Well, let's just say you're *not quite there*.' "

Mary Bodne, whose late husband owned the Algonquin from 1946 to 1987, came over to greet the actress. "Look what they've done to my dear, dear hotel," she said, dabbing her eyes with a tissue. "They've closed the Oak Room doors. The Oak Room doors were never once closed! I can't dance anymore." The great Beckettian rose, put her arm around the older woman's waist, and twirled her gently. "Of *course* you can dance," Billie Whitelaw said. ♦

"The Great Black Hope," Darcy O'Brien; "The Victorian Game," Gardner Botsford; "The Spoiler," James Traub; "Play It Again, Sam," David Samuels.



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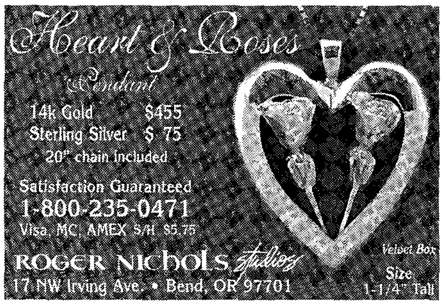

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LETTER FROM SERBIA

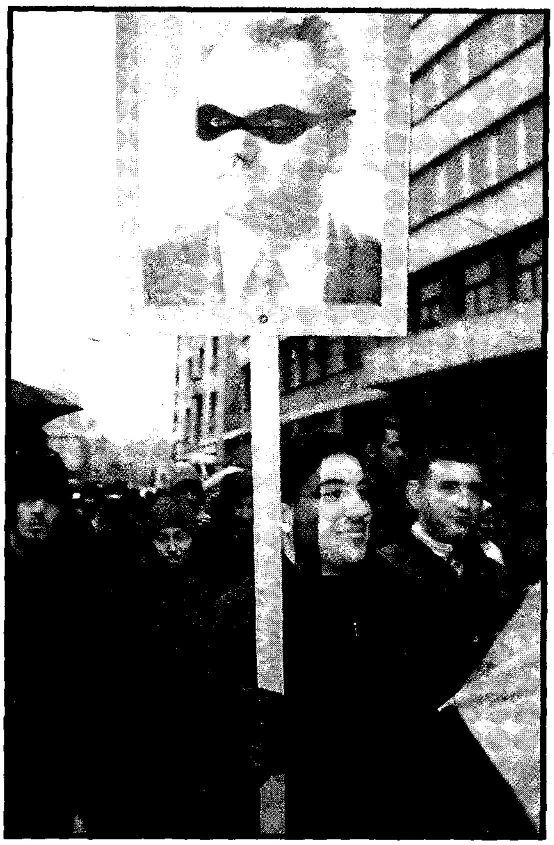
ARISTOTLE IN BELGRADE

It's certainly dramatic, but is it catharsis?

BY LAWRENCE WESCHLER

Several weeks into the Situation, as everyone in Belgrade had taken to calling the anti-government demonstrations that began in mid-November, protesting students were using bullhorns to lecture the police on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and other subjects of a historical and literary nature. After several hours of "classes" on Plato, Walt Whitman, and the pernicious consequences for spinal alignment of the continuous wearing of bulletproof vests, the police couldn't keep a straight face. Finally, they just threw in the towel and let the students march where they wanted to. "Milosevic has really got himself a problem," observed a friend of mine, Milan Vasic, a crusty independent journalist and longtime student of the police. "The shelf life of a regime-loyal cop these days may be no more than a week." Belgrade felt, in sum, like a place the world has been repeatedly over the past generation: with a people rising up in joyous self-liberation as the regime's authority seemed magically to melt away. But this was not a place any of us have been before.

The Situation began after the government of Slobodan Milosevic tried to overturn or ignore the results of several municipal elections, and has consisted of a burgeoning series of ever wilder improvisations and more inventive responses to the regime's increasingly ham-fisted efforts to quiet things down. For the longest time, state television covered the daily protest marches and rallies hardly at all, and, when it deigned to do so, buried the coverage late in its seven-thirty newscast, featuring images taken on the scraggly edges of surging throngs, with voice-overs claiming that the protests were limited to a few hundred spoilsports and the occasional "accidental passerby."



Students in the streets. Were they enraged about having fought the war or about having lost it?

TOM HALEY/SIPA PRESS

The protests were in fact enormous—tens and even hundreds of thousands of participants, many of them sporting buttons identifying them as an "Accidental Passerby"—and incredibly noisy. A student handball referee claims credit for having been the first to blow a whistle, though soon small entrepreneurial fortunes were being made supplying the throng with cheap multicolored plastic mouthpieces and more elaborate soccer-match horns and clangers of all sorts. Whenever someone at a microphone would mention Milosevic's name, the crowd would lash itself into a frenzy of madcap vituperation. The proceedings were broadcast over the weak signal of the town's chief independent station, Radio B92, and each neighborhood would join in with its own noise revel.

This tendency was formalized by January, when it was decreed from the podium at the foot of the equestrian statue of Prince Mihailo (the Serbian monarch during whose reign, in the mid-nineteenth century, the Turks finally surrendered their centuries-long control over Serbian lands) that the entire town should endeavor to drown out the noxious bleatings of the TV news, and, indeed, night after night thereafter, from seven-thirty to eight, all Belgrade seemed to let loose full throttle, deploying pots and pans and all manner of improvised contraptions (my favorite being a tuba yoked to a vacuum cleaner). Radio B92 monitored the relative decibel achievements of different city blocks through round-robin phone-ins, and the winners were praised at the next day's rallies.

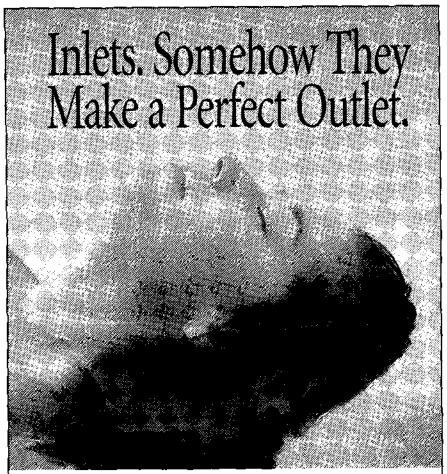
NO one could have been more surprised by all this than Milosevic, the self-appointed savior of the Serbs. Even though the nationalistic seizures and horrendous war that he set in motion had destroyed his country, for a long time the savior himself had remained eerily unaffected by the calamities around him. He had continued to hold sway over a remarkably lean dictatorial system: as long as he controlled the security forces and the national media, he didn't really much care what anybody else said or did or thought. Even the pervasive economic devastation seemed to work in his favor, rendering his subjects, surly and disaffected though they might be, too frantically preoccupied with the requirements of their own immediate survival to consider any serious political engagement.

Granted, Milosevic's horizon was not entirely clear. There was the fact, for instance, that he was constitutionally barred from seeking a third term as Serbian President in 1997. But such an impediment did not seem insurmountable: the elections could be forestalled, the terms of the constitution reinterpreted. And in the meantime he could count on the likelihood that his opposition (whose hapless fractiousness had constituted a bulwark of his regime) would fail once again to mount any significant challenge in the local elections scheduled for this past November.

Instead, however, things began going oddly. The opposition, improbably, did unite, under the rubric "Zajedno" ("Together"), and somehow even managed to stick together. Notwithstanding the virtually complete news blackout bedevilling its campaign, Zajedno emerged from the final tallies on Sunday, November 17th, as the upset winner, by decisive margins, in fourteen of the country's biggest cities. Or so it appeared until the state television mysteriously suspended its reports—and the various local electoral committees (dominated by the ruling coalition) began spewing all sorts of patently bogus results.

Zajedno cried foul, accusing the regime of having "stolen" the election (a peculiar locution in Serbo-Croatian—"*ukrasti*," the word for "stealing," in lieu of "*prevara*," or "cheating"—but one that proved highly effective since it seemed to line up with people's barely suppressed rage over all the other sorts of thefts and depredations to which the authorities and their minions had routinely been subjecting them for years). The leaders of Zajedno converged on the Serbian parliament building, where they announced an occupation strike, or a hunger strike, or something—it wasn't entirely clear—and Milosevic had them evicted, allegedly on the ground that the entire building had to be temporarily closed for fumigation. Meanwhile, down the street, to everyone's surprise, students at the University of Belgrade erupted in protest. (This was the generation that had grown up with Milosevic's saturation propaganda campaigns, and their rebellion was seen by the older generation as something of a miracle.) These two developments were to have disastrous consequences for the regime. In separate, distinct, but parallel manifestations, the Zajedno followers and the students took to the streets in earnest, swarming through the city day after day.

THE students tended to gather around noon at the university mall, and Zajedno's followers would show up around three under the statue of Prince Mihailo in Republic Square and then head off for somewhere like the state-television complex, which they liberally pelted with eggs. The marches generally began with ten or twenty thousand participants and picked up tens of thousands more as they went along. People carried placards that taunted the authorities—especially the resolutely oblivious state-television newscasters—with increasing verve and imagination. Everyone's favorite was the sign carried by two striking young blondes: "Even blondes get it!" Everyone's second favorite was the one carried the next day



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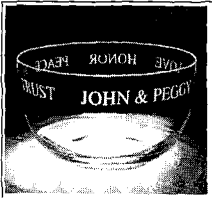

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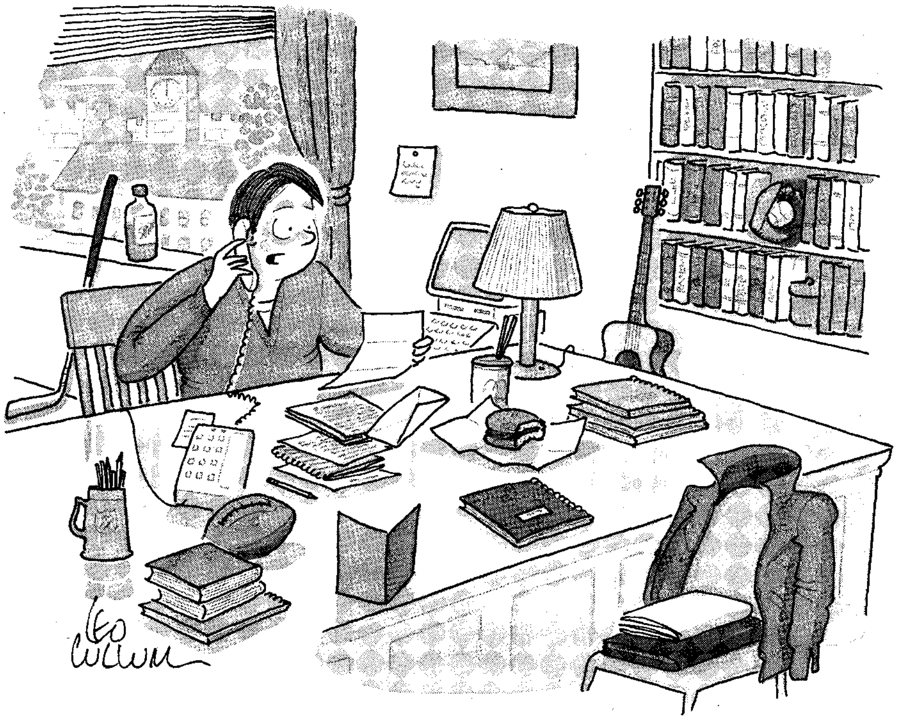

"Dad, the dean has gone over your financial statement, and he doesn't think you're working up to your full potential."

• •

by a decidedly schlumpy middle-aged gentleman: "Even *dentists* get it!"

Milosevic, in part, perhaps, because he had so completely bought in to his own idea about being the savior of his people, must have assumed that this couldn't go on forever. But he was said to be surrounded by hard-liners—including his wife, Mirjana (known as Mira, to Milosevic's Slobo), a truly sinister and improbably vain figure, who resembles something of a cross between the Pillsbury Doughgirl and Betty Boop—and they were demanding a more concerted response, which was probably the origin of the idea behind the regime's big "For Serbia" counter-rally.

On the morning of December 24th, busloads of Milosevic's supporters—or, rather, of workers who had been given the day off and ordered to attend—converged on Terazije Square from all over the country. Terazije Square was a regular gathering point for the other demonstrators also, and the two crowds, predictably, jostled against each other. Fistfights erupted on both sides, and there were several quite serious incidents in which beefy plainclothes thugs boiled out from amidst the regime's demonstrators and severely beat people who happened accidentally to be passing by. Although to a considerable extent the "For Serbia" rally backfired miserably in that previously blinkered provincial Serbians now saw for themselves the true dimensions of the Situation in Belgrade, the regime was able to use the violence as the basis for a ban on further marches through the city. Busloads of grim, helmeted policemen arrived to enforce the prohibition.

The regime's opponents, however, were not without recourses of their own. They called out their "armored divisions," inviting supporters to converge on the city center at a specified time, thereby creating such a monumental traffic jam (horns blaring and emergency lights blinking) that protesters ("the infantry") were able to break out and march right down the middle of the city's clogged streets. But after an evening march across town to the Orthodox cathedral on the Serbian Christmas Eve, January 6th, attended by half a million suddenly pious souls, the regime clamped down further, engirdling the downtown mall with thick police cordons and forbidding any more shenanigans. The students, in the interim, decided to launch their Police University, starting with a reading, over a bullhorn, of the entry on "Morality" from a junior encyclopedia. "After all," it was explained, "these are just beginners, we've got to take it slow and easy." Well past midnight on January 10th, with the students showing no sign of letting up, four police commanders in the center of the road consulted nervously, edgily eying the manifestly deteriorating discipline all around them. Then they surrendered the street to the kids, who now came surging forward once again.

It was a veritable carnival, as velvet as velvet could be. And yet this wasn't Prague, this was Belgrade, where ten and nine and eight years ago, as Milosevic was in the process of consolidating his power, throngs just as lusty and passionate and virtually unanimous had exulted in his bloodcurdling bacchanalias of nationalist renewal, thereby helping precipitate their country into some of the most horrendous episodes of ethnic carnage in the modern era. Where had all these people been during the decimation of Vukovar, the shelling of Dubrovnik, the siege of Sarajevo, or the massacres at Srebrenica? This was a city with blood on its hands, and it was by no means obvious what the attitude of the people massing in their new throngs was to all that blood, or if, indeed, they had any attitude at all. Were they enraged about having fought the war or about having lost it? The signals were mixed. What was one to make of that sea of arms raised in the traditional Serbian three-fingered salute?

Observing developments during November and December from my office in New York, I recalled my travels through the region last summer and in particular what I thought of as a strange species of "brain damage" I'd kept encountering, whether in Serbia or in Croatia—a kind of mutually reinforcing delirium of misperception (as if each side in the conflict had driven the other temporarily insane with a sense of bottomless grievance and jingoist self-assertion). Hopefully, I began to allow myself to imagine that Belgraders were now in the process, as it were, of driving themselves sane. On the other hand, more warily, I recalled the sheer extent and depth of the brain damage that was going to have to be overcome.

For instance, there was the money changer I'd met up with outside a café in Pozarevac, Milosevic's old home town—a strapping, burly fellow with a few days' growth of beard. What did he make of the country's situation? "Well," he began, "what do you expect with a country that's being ruled by a woman?"—a reference, of course, to Milosevic's wife, Mira, who has all along been considerably more despised than he is. I invited the fellow inside for a drink, and it turned out that he was a Serb from Kosovo, the ancestral Serb lands whose current ninety-per-cent-Albanian population had provided the original pretext for Milosevic's lurch toward hypernationalism back in 1987. (He'd claimed that the Albanians there were persecuting the remaining Serbs.)

What did the money changer think of those Albanians? "Oh, you know," he said, "unlike a lot of people up here, I was living with them on a day-to-day basis, they were my neighbors and my friends. They're an honorable people. They weren't hurting anybody." So then what had he thought of Milosevic's visit to the Kosovo capital, Pristina, in April, 1987, when he promised the local Serbs that he wouldn't allow anyone to "beat" them anymore? "That was great. *That was great!*" And of the President's return visit, two years later, for the commemorative celebration of the six-hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, where the Serbs had been defeated by the Turks? "Wonderful, wonderful. I was there. It made me proud." Fired up with all that pride, he had volunteered for the Army and had been able to take part in, as he put it, "the liberation of Vukovar"—the battle in which the picturesque town along the Croat-Slavonian side of the Danube River was levelled to the ground. In fact, he'd fought in all sorts of battles—he regaled me with tales—and what really pissed him off these days was the way "that coward Milosevic" had taken all that blood, the blood of Serbian martyrs, and just thrown it away, abandoning the Krajina and Eastern Slavonia and the graves of his comrades. Whom, I asked him, did he intend to support in the upcoming elections? Without batting an eye, he replied, "Milosevic."

ONE hesitates to make vast general statements about the mentality of an entire people, but this conversation was typical of the kind I had with dozens of other Serbs as well (and, for that matter, with dozens of Croats, and even some Muslims). Tendrils of rationality seemed to float in the ether: you would get thirty seconds of pristine reason, followed by a ten-second free fall through the abyss, followed by another twenty-five seconds of common sense.

To put things another way, using a computing metaphor, it was as if there were certain flaws in the Serbian operating system. Serbs didn't seem to understand, for instance, the notion that you couldn't believe both A and B if B had elements in it that were contrary to A. You had to *make up your mind.* They were not bound by the simple notion of the incompatibility of opposites, nor did they seem unduly bound by its corollary, the notion of consequence, the idea that if you come to believe X this might have implications for how you then have to behave in the world.

In fairness, it wasn't hard to see where this kind of thinking came from. For decades, state propaganda had blithely spewed forth all manner of contradictory positions—most recently, the notion that Milosevic, the man of war, had in fact been a man of peace all along (a notion with which many of the world's leaders had for that matter been all too willing to play along). Six months ago, Belgrade was in the high summertime of Milosevic's peace offensive, with him and Mira acting as if the war had never happened. "We fought and we lost" was how the film director Srdjan Dragojevic parsed the matter, "and now they're doing everything possible to convince us that we didn't fight and we didn't lose." And Belgraders generally were happy to go along with the conceit.

In the late nineteen-eighties, most of the citizens of Belgrade had been caught up in Milosevic's crusade toward a Greater Serbia—the exalted fantasy, that is, of "All Serbs in One Nation," with its attendant requirement of drastic territorial revisions, bloodily achieved if necessary, so that any non-Serbs in outlying districts that included Serbs would either have to leave (voluntarily or by force) or else subject themselves to the Greater Serbian hegemony. At first, the ambition did not seem altogether implausible (after all, the Serbs had inherited the bulk of the equipment from the former Yugoslav People's Army), but by the beginning of last year all that Milosevic had delivered was the perverse obverse of that original dream. Virtually all Serbs *were* now living in one state, but that was only because those in the outlying areas (with the possibly temporary exception of certain swaths of Bosnia) had been routed and forced back into the narrow confines of the original motherland as abject refugees—a debacle of truly world-historical proportions. Serbs had been living in the Krajina and Eastern Slavonia for centuries—neither the Balkan wars nor either of the subsequent World Wars had managed to dis-

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lodge them—but not anymore. And yet, far from being welcomed or even minimally succored in their receiving motherland, these refugees seemed to be even more despised than the far-off Croats or Muslims, those ostensible blood enemies of yore—in part, perhaps, because the refugees so vividly incarnated both the war and the fiasco everybody else was attempting so fervently to forget.

WHEN it came to the question of moral responsibility for the war, Serbians had, as my reporter pal Vasic liked to put it, "a blind spot the size of Bosnia-Herzegovina." Or, as I sometimes felt, reverting to my computer analogy, a definite bug in the software. It was as if you'd barely finish typing in, say, the word "Srebrenica" when the screen would spontaneously pox over with a veritable blizzard of rebuttals. Oh, yeah, but what about Cambodia? What about Vietnam? What about the NATO bombing runs on our guys? What about the twenty Serb villagers massacred in the environs of Srebrenica in 1992? And what about the Ustashe massacres in the Second World War? And what about the Turk treachery at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389? What about the ten thousand Krajina Serbs who disappeared during the Croatian blitz offensive in 1995 (a total fabrication but a convenient one, since it so neatly seemed to balance out the eight thousand Muslims still unaccounted for, and presumed dead, in the wake of Srebrenica)? And, anyway, how come everybody so easily credits that eight-thousand figure? Simply because it puts Serbians in a bad light? Has anybody actually seen all eight thousand of the bodies?

One evening last summer in Belgrade, I had coffee with a woman I had met at a showing of Srdjan Dragojevic's "Pretty Villages, Pretty Flames," a withering Catch-22-like satire of the Bosnian war that devolves into the story of a dishevelled band of Serbian irregulars holed up in a dead-end tunnel, pathetically pinned down under a merciless siege. (Admittedly, an inside-out characterization of the Bosnian conflict.) The woman told me a bit of her life history: she was thirty years old, a kindergarten teacher; she'd been visiting her brothers in the United States during the late eighties when, overcome with homesickness, she'd made what she described as the mistake of her life, returning to Belgrade just as the country fell apart; she hated Milosevic but was otherwise somewhat confused politically. She was a good person.

I took my time—it takes a while, talking with Belgraders, especially if you're an American, before you can establish your credentials, that you're not some knee-jerk Serb-hater, but I thought I'd done so—and then I hazarded out upon the topic of Srebrenica. "So a couple of dozen Muslims were killed," she shot back defensively. "Why does everybody keep beating us over the head with that?" I suggested that it was more than a couple of dozen. "O.K., so a couple of hundred—it was wartime, what do you expect?" No, I persisted, it was more like several thousand. She hesitated. How did I know? Where was the evidence? I explained that I'd been at some of the mass gravesites and I'd heard eyewitness testimony from survivors. I described how men were taken off buses by the hundred, their arms bound behind their backs, and were paraded to ditches and machine-gunned in cold blood for hour after hour after hour. She was silent for a few moments—authentically shaken, it seemed. Not that she was hearing this for the first time, I don't think, but maybe she was being forced for the first time to truly listen and to take it in.

She sighed and steadied herself. "Well," she replied at length. "I knew someone in Croatia, a Serbian girl working in a restaurant, and one day these militiamen came barging in on the place, lined the staff up along a wall, selected one boy at random, killed him, and then told all the others that if they ever so much as breathed a word about it, they'd come back and kill them, too."

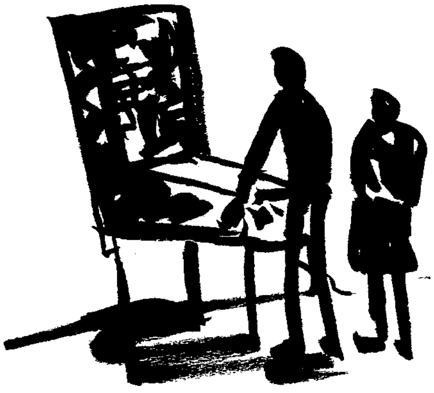
I waited for the rest of the story, but it gradually became clear that that was it—there was no more.

"The point is," the woman elucidated, "the boy at the restaurant—they *stabbed* him."

I still wasn't getting it.

"They stabbed him! Can you imagine? *Stabbed.* I mean, the people in Srebrenica, O.K., so there were more of them, but at least there they were machine-gunned, so they all died instantly, mercifully. And each individual can only die once. But try to imagine the agony of that poor Serb boy who was stabbed like that for no reason."

Like I say: brain damage.



"YOU never hear of a Serb just dying in battle," Vasic likes to say. "They're always being 'butchered' or 'slaughtered' or 'massacred.' " And, indeed, Serbian culture is pickled in the brine of the epic, the heroic, the mythomaniac—the endless cycles of mindless atrocity and atrocious retribution. I had thought last summer when I was travelling around the country that what the people of the Balkans generally, and the Serbs in particular, really needed was a transition from the epic to the tragic, from the Homeric to the Sophoclean: Oedipus has the evidence of his own tortuously tangled complicities staring him full in the face the entire while, and yet he just can't see, he can't see, he can't see, until finally, in a great moment of cathartic revelation, the scales fall from his eyes, and he does see. He sees, he acknowledges, and somehow he goes on. Or Euripides (who even managed to write a play from the point of view of the *Trojan* women!): how in his "Bacchae" Agave comes staggering home from her Dionysian revels, exultant, triumphant, brandishing in her arms the bloody lion's head she'd earlier managed (in her ecstatic delirium) to tear free with her bare hands, only gradually (under the gentle prodding of her horrified father) coming to realize ("I do not understand this question—and yet I am somehow becoming in my full senses, changed from my previous state of mind") that this is no lion's head wrenched clean from its roots but, rather, that of Pentheus, her own beloved son.

That was the sort of cathartic realization and self-recognition that seemed so desperately called for, and when the protesters began assembling in Belgrade I found myself wondering if it was at last beginning to occur.

But the sad truth is that anyone headed for Belgrade these days seeking evidence of an authentic cathartic transformation is bound to be disappointed—though he may be asking the wrong questions. The joy in the streets, the verve of long-dormant political engagement—all that is wonderfully bracing. But there is a hollow in the center: the roar of everything that is being left unsaid. One of the most common placard slogans in Republic Square—the exultant "Belgrade Is the World!"—might at first seem an innocuous riff on "We Are the World" or "The Whole World Is Watching," of Chicago, 1968. Yet there is something strainingly solipsistic about it. Sarajevo and Vukovar and Srebrenica and Dubrovnik and Kosovo, you found yourself wanting to say, are *also* the World: *What about them*? For they were hardly ever mentioned. In their stead came the lusty, full-throated denunciations of Slobo and Mira—the half-hour catcall deliriums.

There was, as ever in the crowds of Belgrade, a note of righteously plaintive grievance, about all the terrible things that had been done to them, the Serbs, whether by the Turks or the Croats or the Germans or the Americans or—as now—by Slobodan and his evil wife. The concentrated vilification was another way of occluding any inklings of one's own possible co-responsibility. "Milosevic to The Hague!" a boozy fellow in a tattered trenchcoat boomed forth quite unexpectedly one evening in Republic Square—"Slobo to the Tribunal!" My companion that evening immediately recognized the man as an outdoor CD vender who a few years ago could just as regularly be heard hawking the most bloodcurdlingly virulent anti-Croat cassettes with equally self-satisfied gusto.

ALTHOUGH it's common nowadays to assume that the dismal hypernationalist hysteria that swept over the Serbs in the late eighties was some lumpen virus that mysteriously overtook the urban élites, what actually happened was the reverse. Many, if not most, members of the Belgrade academic and cultural élite (including the novelist Dobrica Cosic, of the Serbian Academy, and such colleagues of his as the internationally best-selling novelist Milorad Pavic, of "Dictionary of the Khazars" fame, and the poet Matija Beckovic) were among the most fervent incubators of the original Greater Serbia project. And many of them are now prominent among the backers of the current uprising—addressing rallies, currying favor with the students—in part, no doubt, in order to launder their reputations, but in part, as well, in order to repackage their as yet unrepented ideological project.

I visited a group of student leaders one day, imagining that I might encounter some clearer thinking about the past, and at first I was quite heartened. The students voiced dismay at the way they'd been characterized in some of Chris Hedges's reporting in the *Times* (they'd clearly been tracking the clippings) as a band of mad-dog Serbian-nationalist crypto-fascists (their characterization of his characterization). And, indeed, they presented themselves as conscientious and levelheaded, simultaneously aware of the immense stakes involved in the struggle upon which they'd embarked and yet unwilling to take themselves too seriously—an altogether winning combination.

Encouraged, I decided to hazard the Srebrenica question. But that provoked the bug in the software: Which Srebrenica—1995, 1992, 1941? Why not Pol Pot? What about NATO's bombing runs? And, anyway, what about Srebrenica? From what one of the kids understood, there had never been any eight thousand massacred—this had been *proved*—there'd only been fifteen hundred Muslim soldiers who'd tried to fight their way out of the siege and ended up getting killed in the ensuing battle. (Everyone else nodded in assent.) And so forth.

The kids rejected the notion of collective guilt: only individuals could be held liable for crimes, whereas the Serb people as a whole had absolutely nothing to be ashamed of. Sure, there had been a few war criminals and they deserved to be tried—but by national courts, and not by that farce in The Hague, which clearly had it in for the Serbian people as a whole.

This last formulation was one I heard repeatedly, and it was especially ironic, since both Judge Richard Goldstone, the original chief prosecutor for the war-crimes Tribunal in The Hague, and his successor, Louise Arbour, have repeatedly proclaimed that one of the main rationales behind their exercise is the need to establish individual criminal liability for heinous war crimes precisely as a way of breaking the terrible cycle in which otherwise unassigned guilt gets attributed to the entire group, thereby serving as an excuse for subsequent retaliatory rounds of ethnic violence. This is a message that manifestly has not got through. Indicted

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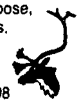

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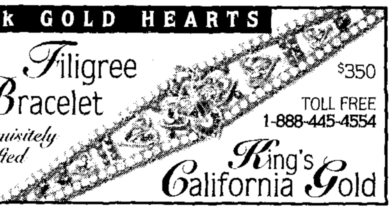

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war criminals—and those who fear that they may yet one day be indicted as such—whether in Serbia, the Republika Srpska, or Croatia, have been almost entirely successful in convincing their countrymen that the Tribunal's animus is directed at the people as a whole rather than at any specific individuals, so that vigilant defiance becomes almost a patriotic imperative. "You see," one of the students interjected, "we are afraid of the humiliation of our people. The humiliation of a nation is a terrible thing."

My conversations with the three principal leaders of Zajedno were not much more encouraging on this score. Vesna Pesic, a diminutive academic with a warm smile, certainly had the least to be ashamed of, biographically speaking. She was a founding member of Belgrade's Helsinki Committee and the founder of Serbia's first antiwar organization (in 1991), and since 1992 has been the head of the Civic Alliance, a small, principled electoral party, in the tradition of Vaclav Havel and Adam Michnik, comprising mainly Belgrade intellectuals. For many years, she was one of the most vilified individuals in the country.

Pesic suggested that it was too soon to expect any serious historical coming to terms on the part of ordinary people, who, after all, had been living in a media swamp the past several years and had no way of knowing the sorts of things that someone with her connections would have been able to find out. On the other hand, she had some surprising views. As our conversation turned to Kosovo, she proclaimed, "And who says the Albanians are necessarily so right? Nationalism among the Albanians in Kosovo is much more disciplined. I assure you you wouldn't find any dissident like me among them: it wouldn't be allowed." About the Tribunal in The Hague, she expressed serious misgivings: "It just hangs there in midair, a court untethered to any sort of state power, having to rely on endlessly contradictory witnesses, and after all this money, what does it have to show for itself? This small-fry Tadic and not much else." Fair enough, but that was in part due to the noncoöperation of the Serbs. What of the need to arrest Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic and the other indicted suspects in the Republika Srpska? "I don't see anything being done by the United States," she replied somewhat testily, "and you have an entire military force there." What, I asked, of Srebrenica? "But even that's not clear. After all that digging, what have the investigators uncovered? A few hundred bodies. Who knows what actually happened?"

Zoran Djindjic, the forty-four-year-old head of the Democratic Party, had an altogether odder political history. A classic Western-style politician of the Congressman Forehead type (thick blow-dried salt-and-pepper thatch, clean shaven, with sparkling eyes and a boyish grin), he'd started his career as a sixties-style student activist at the University of Belgrade, was imprisoned, and then left the country in frustration to pursue a graduate education in Germany—at, among other places, the Frankfurt School, where he studied under the direction of the great post-Marxist theorist Jürgen Habermas. Drifting gradually toward the neo-liberal right (from Herbert Marcuse toward Margaret Thatcher), he secured a series of prestigious posts at German universities before returning to Belgrade in 1989, in part to assist in the creation of the new free-market-oriented Democratic Party.

Djindjic is quite unabashed in accounting for his party's sudden nationalistic lurch around 1993: "We got three per cent in the 1992 election. If we were going to be players, we were going to have to go where the electorate was. It was as simple as that. We did, and our fortunes improved considerably." (Djindjic has been likened, with regard to this preternatural political pliability of his, to Bill Clinton.) In particular, he began championing the Bosnian Serbs at a time when Milosevic, for his own reasons, was beginning to distance himself from them. "These poor people had been abandoned by everyone," he says, "and I was overcome with a feeling of empathy for them. That's not pragmatism: on the contrary, that's an expression of purest principle." As recently as last year, he was a strong and active supporter of Karadzic's party in the Bosnian Serb elections—in part, he says, because Milosevic was campaigning against it.

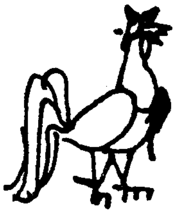
I asked him about the siege of Vukovar and the shelling of Dubrovnik. "Neither of those ever made the slightest military sense." And the siege and shelling of Sarajevo? "That's a different matter: that was the product of a military strategy that can be criticized but can at least be understood. The Serb forces were trying to tie down as many Muslim units as possible so that they couldn't be used to attack elsewhere." Djindjic was on record as saying that he now completely supported the Dayton process. But what would he do if Mladic and Karadzic suddenly showed up in Belgrade? Would he arrest them? He said that he'd try to get

"Which one would you like—'My Life' the director's cut, or 'My Life' for general release?"

word to them "not to come here, so as not to make trouble for me."

As Djindjic escorted me out into the hall, through a group of young men sporting haircuts virtually identical to his, I asked him with which Western or European politician he most identified. He fixed me with a winning grin and said, "Kennedy."

All the guys milling around the headquarters of Vuk Draskovic's Serbian Renewal Party seemed to have the same haircut as *he* does, which is to say long, flowing dark locks and a thick black beard. Draskovic, a novelist and former journalist, is a charismatic, almost folkloric figure. At the rallies, he alone could bring the teeming crowd to absolute hushed stillness (even those who thought he was full of baloney seemed to grow quiet, perhaps just wanting to hear the uncanny sound of everyone else's silence). He spoke in arching rhetorical phrases, tapping the deepest wellsprings of Serbian longings and tradition. Originally considerably more radically (and infinitely more authentically) nationalist than Milosevic, he'd turned against the war very early on, condemning Vukovar as "the Hiroshima of the Serbian nation," a stain on the national honor. He'd been arrested and had suffered a brutal, near-fatal beating at the hands of Milosevic's henchmen in 1993.



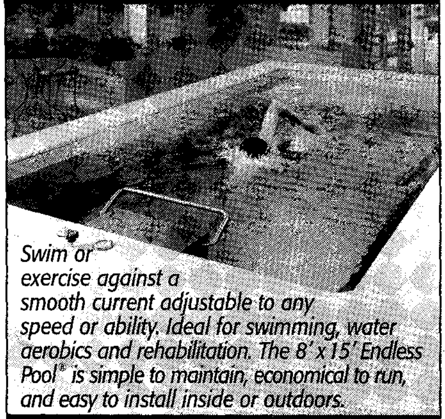
Speaking in a husky, jagged English, Draskovic said all the right things, and then some—he knew who he was speaking to (an American reporter)—and it was almost as if he were on automatic pilot. He favored Dayton and the Tribunal in The Hague. (He said that were Milosevic ever to be indicted, he would be entirely pleased to extradite him personally.) With regard to Kosovo, he said that the solution lay in rigorous respect for everyone's human rights and the greatest possible local autonomy. By Greater Serbia, he insisted, he'd always meant a Serbia greater because it was better, because it aspired to a higher moral position. He claimed that he'd never favored territorial revisions.

I asked Draskovic what had moved him from his earlier militantly nationalist stance. There are those who speculate that he was horrified by the treatment of Muslim friends and neighbors in his onetime Bosnian home town; there are others who suggest that, in good Serbian tradition, he considers the Muslims to actually be Serbs, and he was appalled that Serbs would treat one another that way. There are others who suggest that he was authentically shocked by the level of carnage his nationalist preachings inspired.

But he denied all of it. "I am proud of the fact," he declaimed majestically, "that I didn't change a single opinion or program in my life, not once, ever!" He denied having personally sponsored a militia in the early stages of the Croatian war ("This is Milosevic's misinformation, a complete lie") or ever having said that Serbian Muslims caught hoisting their green flags stood to lose both their flags and their arms. He denied it all, this despite the fact that I'd visited him accompanied by a well-known Serbian journalist who he would have had to know could easily provide me with documentation on the particulars of such incidents—denied it with such blustery, passionate conviction that I began to think he actually believed everything he was saying. "What can I tell you?" a friend commented later. "The man's a mythomaniac."

No matter how dismaying these conversations with the students and the leaders of Zajedno were, what was happening on the streets *was* impressive: the resolute good humor, the striking commitment to nonviolence, the sense of purpose and of consequence. These people were making up their minds. In addition, as Aleksa Djilas, a political analyst and the son of the renowned dissident Milovan Djilas, pointed out, "Whatever one's misgivings, one has to acknowledge these events for the breakthrough they are. It's been incredibly rare in Serbian history that people have demonstrated like this on behalf of democracy. There have of course been nationalist demonstrations and monarchist demonstrations and, in 1968, left-wing radical manifestations that lent themselves to manipulation by Tito as a way of repressing Party liberals. But here people are on the street, day after day, on behalf of a single, focussed demand: *They want the results of an election honored.* This is new, surprising, almost unaccountable—a profoundly hopeful development."

"They want to like themselves," the



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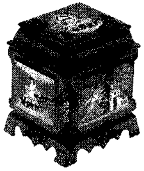

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sociologist Nebojsa Popov commented. "They need something to be proud of, and all that is to the good. You have to realize the sort of nationalist fog we've been living through in the past several years—the bogus, hysterical pride."

I was repeatedly told by longtime oppositionists that my hankering for instant clarity about the past was unfair and premature. These were agonizingly difficult truths that were going to have to be fleshed out and absorbed. People invoked the German analogy, where the process of de-Nazification had taken more than a generation. All of which was fine, as far as it went. The trouble was that the Serbs might not have the luxury of a generation to come to their senses about the immediate past. For all the analogies to the situation in Germany after the Second World War, it seemed to me far more likely that Serbs in the years ahead—assuming they're able to rid themselves of Milosevic and his cohorts one way or another—will be facing a situation far more like Germany's after the First World War: a fragile, inexperienced, rickety democracy and an utterly devastated economy with, specifically, a decimated, once proud middle class and all sorts of resentful unemployed war veterans milling around convinced that they were stabbed in the back, that the victory they achieved in battle was squandered at some far-off peace conference.

In fact, some Serbs have been speculating nervously that they may already have a potential Hitler in their midst. All the exhilaration over Zajedno's performance in the local elections has tended to occlude the fact that the Serbian Radical Movement of Vojisla Seselj (pronounced "Scheshel"), the leader of one of the most ruthless paramilitary groups of the war, scored three-quarters of a million votes. Seselj himself was elected mayor of the Belgrade suburb of Zemun, where his impact has been immediate: he has quite literally vowed to make the buses run on time; he is at his desk fifteen hours a day and has announced that he expects similar devotion to duty from all the other municipal employees. (Bureaucratic applications that used to require weeks to ooze through city hall's sclerotic arteries are now being processed in a matter of minutes.) He has also let it be known, in all seriousness, that he considers the solution to the Kosovo problem to be the enforced inoculation of the majority Albanian population with the AIDS virus.

As the rapturous throng of students came surging past my hotel window the night of their Police University breakout, I was reminded of lines from Seamus Heaney's wonderful play "The Cure at Troy," itself a Sophoclean meditation on the transition out of the epic:

> History says, *Don't hope*
> *On this side of the grave.*
> But then, once in a lifetime
> The longed-for tidal wave
> Of justice can rise up,
> And hope and history rhyme.

Within a few days, Milosevic's regime seemed to give in, announcing that it would be abiding by the municipal election results after all. "Seemed," of course, turned out to be the operative word, for in no time the government was backtracking, or at any rate having difficulty getting its subordinates to enact the alleged concessions. (Many incumbent local chieftains were simply refusing to cede power.) Even in those towns where the oppositionists were in fact taking over city hall (Belgrade and Nis still notably not yet among them), they were discovering the insubstantiality of their reputed new powers: Milosevic had managed to hoard most functions at the national level (even including control over the local traffic police), and in those instances where local oppositionists tried to enforce the few prerogatives they did have (such as control over local television stations), the Old Guard was refusing to be dislodged, and the local authorities pointedly lacked the police muscle to enforce their edicts. Meanwhile, Milosevic—a master at this sort of short-term tactical jockeying—was slashing the share of state revenues allocated to municipalities while transferring ever more onerous responsibilities (for everything from education to road maintenance) to the suddenly strangulated local governments. Clearly, he was still hoping to stare everybody out.

So the demonstrations continued, day after day after day. The oppositionist leaders enchanted the crowds in Republic Square with the news that they'd "broken every sort of Guinness Record for this sort of uprising." The Velvet Czechs had had to hold out for only thirty-eight days whereas Belgraders had already put in twice that. Who knew how much longer this could last? Nerves were beginning to fray and things could still turn ugly at any moment—as in either Tiananmen or Bucharest. But the point was that as yet they hadn't. Not for nothing had the crowds in Republic Square adopted Vangelis's inspirational theme from "Chariots of Fire" as the anthem with which they launched each new rally. They seemed to know that, no matter what, they were going to be in this struggle for the long haul.

My last evening in Belgrade, I attended an astonishing free-form modern-dance performance of "Macbeth," of all things, choreographed by and starring one of the country's foremost theatrical figures, Sonja Vukicevic, in the harrowing role of Lady Macbeth. I say, "of all things," but it quickly became evident that this was the perfect play for this moment. No one in the audience needed a playbill to recognize that what was really being alluded to was the tale of Slobodan and Mira, their lunge for power, and its inevitable, terrifying, blood-drenched dénouement. That was the easy part, but Vukicevic was up to something far more sophisticated as well. For she'd made the first third of the piece, the exposition of the initial relationship between Macbeth and his wife, incredibly erotic and engrossing, drawing the audience in, inviting people to remember how thrilling and vivifying and involving that initial lunge for power and territory and glory had been for all of them, and thereby implicating them in the horrors that were to follow. This, it seemed to me, in a stylized, theatrical context, was precisely the sort of cathartic confrontation with the past that Serbians in general needed to be moving toward.

After the performance, I said as much to Borka Pavicevic, the dramaturge and chief doyenne of the performance space, the Center for Cultural Decontamination, which had been hosting evenings like this one throughout the darkest days of nationalist hysteria. I tried out my theory about the transition from the Homeric to the Sophoclean, suggesting somewhat facetiously that maybe the Aristotle the kids really needed to be reading, rather than the Nicomachean Ethics, was the Poetics, with its careful elucidation of the themes of recognition and catharsis.

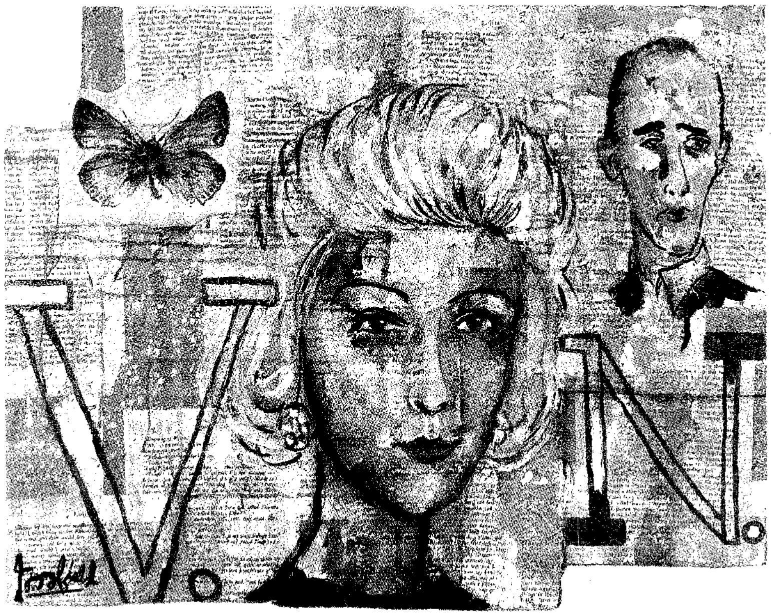
Mrs. Pavicevic smiled but then replied, "The thing is, before you could have Sophocles you had to have a polis—the possibility, that is, of face-to-face relations between equals. Democracy has to precede catharsis, not the other way around." ◆

THE GENIUS AND MRS. GENIUS

The very Nabokovian marriage of Vladimir and Véra.

BY STACY SCHIFF

VLADIMIR NABOKOV was famous at Cornell, where he taught between 1948 and 1959, for a number of reasons. None had anything to do with the literature; few people knew what he had written, and even fewer had read his work. Tearing Dostoyevski to shreds in front of two hundred undergraduates made an impression, as did the pronouncement that good books should not make us think but make us shiver. The fame derived in part, too, from the fact that the professor did not come to class alone. He arrived on campus driven by Mrs. Nabokov, he crossed campus with Mrs. Nabokov, and he occasionally appeared in class on the arm of Mrs. Nabokov, who carried his books. In fact, the man who spoke so often of his own isolation was one of the most accompanied loners of all time; at Cornell, especially, he was in the constant company of his wife. And he was legendary for it.



She did all she could to see to it that he existed not in time, only in art.

JOSH GOSFIELD

Mrs. Nabokov sat either in the front row of the lecture hall or, more often, on the dais, to her husband's left. She rarely missed a class, although she did occasionally teach one when Nabokov was sick, and she often proctored exams alone. She had no speaking role when her husband was in the room. Few people knew anything about her. When Nabokov referred to her, he did so slyly, calling her his assistant. The comments went like this: "My assistant will now move the blackboard to the other side of the room," "My assistant will now pass out the blue books," "Perhaps my assistant could find the page for me," "My assistant will now draw an oval-faced woman"—this was Emma Bovary—"on the board." And Mrs. Nabokov would do so. The stage directions do not figure in the published lectures.

Véra Nabokov was a striking woman, white-haired and alabaster-skinned, thin and fine-boned. The discrepancy between the hair and the young face was particularly dramatic. She was "mnemogenic," as Nabokov wrote of Clare in "The Real Life of Sebastian Knight"—"subtly endowed with the gift of being remembered." And that is where the trouble begins. According to the faculty and the students at Cornell, she was lumi-

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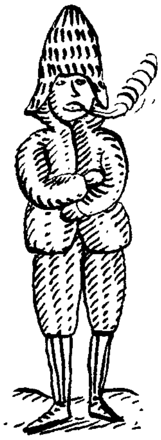
nous, regal, elegance personified, "the most beautiful middle-aged woman I have ever set eyes on"; she was a waif, dowdy, half-starved, the Wicked Witch of the West. To those same students and faculty emeriti went the obvious question: What was Mrs. Nabokov doing in her husband's classroom, lecture after lecture? The answers should come prefaced with the reminder that it was Nabokov who termed rumor the poetry of truth:

- Mrs. Nabokov was there to remind us we were in the presence of greatness, and should not abuse that privilege with our inattention.
- Because Nabokov had a heart condition, and she was at hand with a phial of medicine to jump up at a moment's notice.
- That wasn't his wife, that was his mother.
- Because Nabokov was allergic to chalk dust—and because he didn't like his handwriting.
- To shoo away the coeds. [This before the publication of "Lolita."]
- Because she was his encyclopedia, if ever he forgot anything.
- Because he had no idea what was going to come out of his mouth—and no memory of it after it did—so she had to write it all down so that he would remember what to ask on the exam.
- He was blind, and she was the seeing-eye dog, which explained why they sometimes arrived arm in arm.
- We all knew that she was a ventriloquist.
- She had a gun in her purse, and was there to defend him.

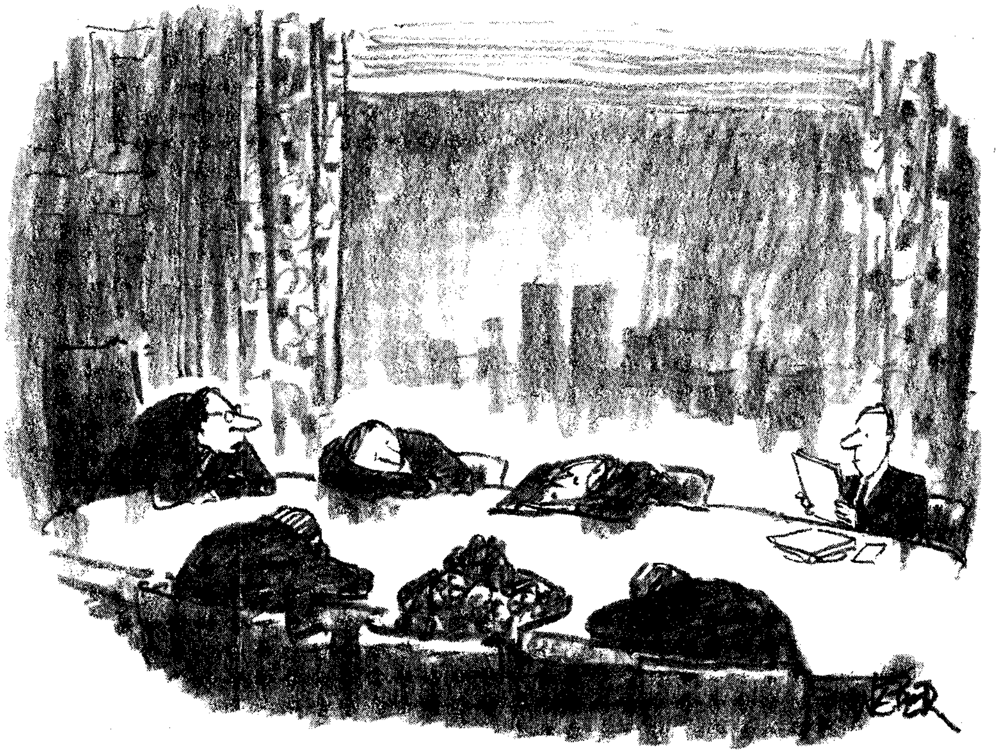
No one was sure who marked the exams, and a few former students admitted that they had made a practice of smiling at Mrs. Nabokov, on the assumption that their geniality would register in their grades. It often was she who graded the blue books, though this does not explain what she was doing in the classroom. She was a mysterious, often intimidating presence in the lecture hall, and she was terrifically exacting, but she was not an ogre of a grader. Ultimately, Nabokov did have teaching assistants, one of whom remembered reading through a hundred and fifty blue books and evaluating them according to a rigorous grading scale. After reading each exam two or three times, he took the pile of blue books to Professor Nabokov's office, hoping finally to chat with the great man. Mrs. Nabokov met him at the door, standing like a sentinel between him and her husband. She took the blue books, immediately raised all the grades to the eighties, and sent the assistant on his way.



VÉRA NABOKOV met her husband in 1923, in Berlin. She was twenty-one. She was born in St. Petersburg, the second daughter of a wealthy Jewish industrialist who was—when his daughter first encountered her future husband—on the brink of losing what remained of his fortune. Probably her family had left Russia in 1920. At the time the couple met, Nabokov was a twenty-four-year-old poet, writing in Russian; Véra Slonim knew and admired his work before she met him. She had literary aspirations of her own, quickly set aside, unless marrying Nabokov, in 1925, counts. The two survived happily if meagrely on money earned from—on her part—secretarial work and commercial translations. Nabokov, for his part, was, as he put it, "a one-man finishing school," a tennis coach, and a movie extra. By the mid-nineteen-thirties, it was abundantly clear that (a) the Nabokovs would not be returning to Russia in anything resembling the near future and (b) they must leave Germany. They spent three exceedingly difficult years in France, mostly in the South, and then departed for America. By the time they got to the boat at the end of "Speak, Memory," three mythical, flourishing worlds had collapsed behind the Nabokovs, who had thrice ventured through the looking glass.

Véra Nabokov was thirty-eight years old when she arrived in America, with a six-year-old son, an uneasy grasp of the English language, and a husband with no long-term job prospects. According to legend, the Nabokovs had a hundred dollars of their own, which Mrs. Nabokov nearly bestowed on their first New York City cabbie, an honest man, to whom she actually owed ninety cents. Both her parents had died in Berlin; other family members and friends were living in Europe, in various stages of distress. Her German was excellent, her French near-perfect—probably it was her first language—but in her diary she admitted that she found it difficult to follow wide-ranging conversations in English. The Nabokovs' apartment—in a West Eighty-seventh Street brownstone—was one she remembered as "a dreadful little flat." We are used to caressing these familiar details in the light of Vladimir Nabokov and his accomplishments, but they translate into something else for Mrs. Nabokov, who never ceased to marvel over the industry of the American housewife. She wrote her sister-in-law that as a housekeeper she was not so much bad as disgusting, rather overstating the case.

In the eight years it took for the immigrant Nabokovs to metamorphose into Americans and for Vladimir to join the Cornell faculty, they continued supporting themselves in much the same way as they had in Berlin. Mrs. Nabokov gave private French lessons to unwilling victims offered up by their parents, who wanted to do what they could for the Nabokovs but realized that they would not accept charity. She worked as a secretary to several language professors at Harvard. She assisted her husband in rewriting his lectures on Russian literature, so that he could deliver them three times a week at Wellesley. And she tended—as she had done since the early days of the courtship, as Clare does in "Sebastian Knight"—to Nabokov's literary affairs. She was her husband's first reader; she smoothed the prose—when it was "still warm and wet"—though later, when scholars questioned this, she generally shrugged off any involvement. Still, her handwriting is there, and it is difficult not to see Véra as the fictional Clare, lifting the edge of a page in the typewriter and declaring, " 'No, my dear. You can't say it so in English. . . . And if for instance,' she would say—and then an exact suggestion would follow." (Twenty-six years later, her husband described Véra's role in his literary life in nearly identical words, as if quoting from his own novel.) She submitted her husband's work to publishers; she typed and researched his lectures. At one point, she stepped in as de-facto curator of lepidoptera at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology. Months after Nabokov's arrival, after he placed his first poem with *The New Yorker*, he talked about his "horrible difficulties and distress in wielding a language new to me." In this same time, Mrs. Nabokov's English grew steadier, more fluent, though it would always be a little stiff, even when it was the language she claimed to write most easily, the language in which she answered her Russian correspondents.



"Damn it, Abernathy, it's nap time."

• •

Within a few years of their arrival in America, she was singlehandedly dealing with publishers. In part, this was because Nabokov was spreading butterflies at the museum or lecturing at Wellesley; in larger part, it was by design. (From a list of the things Nabokov bragged about never having learned to do—type, drive, speak German, retrieve a lost object, answer the phone, fold maps, fold umbrellas, give the time of day to a philistine—it is easy to deduce what Mrs. Nabokov spent her life doing.) A great many letters opened like this: "Vladimir started this letter but had to switch to something else in a hurry, and asked me to continue on my own." She did all she could to see to it that her husband existed not in time, only in art, and thus spared him the fate of so many of his characters, imprisoned by their various passions. The genius went into the work, not into the life—something Mrs. Nabokov had to explain regularly to family members, whose letters to her husband were turned over to her to be answered. This resulted in understandable confusion about authorship, which grew worse over the years.

In a perfectly Nabokovian way, the two identities began to blur on the page. Letters came addressed to all sorts of entities: "Dear V Vs," "Dear VerVolodya," "Dear Author and Mrs. Nabokov." Many of the hallmarks of Nabokov's fiction—the doppelgängers, the impersonators, the Siamese twins, the mirror images, the distorted mirror images, the reflections in the windowpane, the parodies of self—manifested themselves in the routine the Nabokovs developed for dealing with the world, a routine that could leave a correspondent feeling as the books can: humbled by a knotty, magnificent inside joke.

In the nineteen-fifties, Véra wrote to a close Wellesley friend of theirs, "V. was asked to suggest a candidate for [a Guggenheim] and I think I composed a very adequate letter listing your high qualifications. V. signed the letter, of course, and [the] reaction was enthusiastic." This tango, or tangle, of pronouns was used to exceedingly good effect. With two voices at their disposal, the Nabokovs could temper a remark or render it twice as cutting. Mrs. Nabokov could write to a publisher that her husband thought she might hint that they take out some ads—big ads, lots of ads. And at the same time she could render him more distant, his judgments more divine: "My husband asks me to say that he thinks ULYSSES by far the greatest English novel of the century but detests FINNEGANS WAKE." When she needed a more neutral voice, she wrote as J. G. Smith, a fictional Cornell secretary, who shared Mrs. Nabokov's handwriting.

Often, she would write and sign her husband's letters for him, but it was generally clear when she had done so. Nabokov masqueraded as Véra, however: many letters were drafted by him in the third person, in his wife's driest tone, and left for Mrs. Nabokov to type and sign. He would borrow her identity, though she never made an attempt to borrow his. Because his wife was at his side, he could speak in the first-person plural. And, because so frequently the correspondence is not *with* Nabokov but *about* Nabokov, a whole other being is created—a monument called VN, someone who is not even Nabokov. He delighted in explaining that the living, breathing, breakfast-eating Nabokov was but the poor relative of the writer, and was only too happy to refer to himself as "the person I usually impersonate in Montreux." In many ways, this distant, unapproachable VN was Véra Nabokov's construct. How else could Nabokov have established this statuesque other self? With the assistance of Véra, the real Vladimir Nabokov disappeared; it was as if Thomas Pynchon were to enter the federal witness-protection program. All this sleight of hand culminated in another delusional mirror trick, one worthy of "Despair": the word in Montreux was that Véra Nabokov was her husband's ghostwriter, because she was always seen by tradespeople at her desk, and he—who wrote in bed, or standing at his lectern, or in the bath—never was.

WHERE is Véra Nabokov in the literature? Everywhere and nowhere. She was clearly more muse than model: her influence rather than her image hovers over the page. She is less in evidence as author than as inspiration and instigation; she is named in the original title of "Speak, Memory"—

"Conclusive Evidence," with the two "V"s Nabokov liked so much—and, of course, on the dedication page of nearly every novel. The guiding hand is easier to document than her presence as muse, though Nabokov acknowledged the latter role in interviews, and Brian Boyd talks about it at length in his marvellous biography. "Speak, Memory" has been read as a book-length tribute to Véra; "Look at the Harlequins!," written many years later, calls out more loudly to be read the same way.

LIFE UNDERGROUND

As if in an underground cathedral swarming with pilgrims,
he sits stone still, his hands in his lap, legless
on his wooden dolly small as a book.
From a distance he seems an idol of darkness,
the way he faces the broad stairwell as if toward a sacred sea—
eyes transfixed by nothingness, oblivious to the hurried passersby
pouring into the subways and out, as if
from the frenzied cement mixers of destiny.

He doesn't utter a word, he doesn't beg, he doesn't implore, he
 won't thank anybody—
he simply sits like the hub of the surging crowd, motionless,
insignificant, beyond tragic . . .
Above him, a young man stands erect,
eyes lost in "Phenomenology of the Spirit," ice skates
draped casually over one shoulder.

—LILIANA URSU

(*Translated, from the Romanian, by Tess Gallagher and Adam J. Sorkin.*)

Certainly some of the most fertile years of Nabokov's life immediately followed the marriage. Between 1925 and 1935, he wrote as if in a fever. When Véra Slonim met Vladimir Nabokov, he was a poet; he finished his first novel months after they were married, his eighth before the decade was out. In 1924, he recorded a dream in which he sits at the piano with Véra at his side, turning the pages of the score. Forty years later, he had a similar dream, in which he is dictating a new novel to Véra, conscious as he is doing so that it "will please and surprise" her that he is suddenly able to speak aloud with great eloquence. All the same, we can see her more clearly guiding her husband's œuvre as she was said to guide his elbow at Cornell to nudge him along to class. In 1944, when more of Nabokov's energy was going into his lepidopteral work than into his writing, he wrote to Edmund Wilson, "Véra has had a serious conversation with me in regard to my novel. Having sulkily pulled it out from under my butterfly manuscripts I discovered two things, first that it was good, and second that the beginning 20 pages at least could be typed and submitted. This will be done speedily." (The novel became "Bend Sinister." Wilson responded on reading it, "My only possible criticism would be that you sometimes write slightly involved sentences.") We know that Mrs. Nabokov put her foot down when her husband announced that he planned to write a novel about Siamese twins; we have the story "Scenes from the Life of a Double Monster" instead. We know that for "Speak, Memory" she wrote out her recollections of their son Dmitri's early days, at Nabokov's request. The ambitious project of translating Pushkin began at Véra's urging. Nabokov had complained bitterly about the existing translations; she innocently suggested that he try a hand at it himself. Here she gives Tolstoy's wife the greatest run for her money. She may not have transcribed "War and Peace" countless times, but she did type all three thousand pages of the "Onegin" manuscript, and spent hours researching the notes.

Did she enjoy the work? She must have had her qualms. In 1959, after completing a more modest translation on which she had collaborated, she wrote to a friend, "I vow that this is the *last* translation I shall agree to let him do as long as *I* live!" There were still five years of work to be done on "Eugene Onegin."

Most famously, "Lolita" would have been conceived but never born without Mrs. Nabokov. The book returned the favor: if she had not existed at the time of its American publication, her husband would have had to invent her, so strongly did people identify Humbert Humbert with Vladimir Nabokov. At publication parties, admirers told Mrs. Nabokov that they had not exactly expected the author to show up with his white-haired wife of thirty-three years. "Yes," she would respond, smiling, unflappable. "It's the main reason why I am here." Twice, at least, Nabokov set out to feed the novel to the Ithaca incinerator, exactly as John Shade does with his drafts in "Pale Fire." Nabokov was stopped by his wife. She was the woman who drove the Oldsmobile in the back seat of which he wrote the novel; she was the woman who slept in all Humbert Humbert's motel rooms. She made the arrangements for the book's publication. At one time, she scurried around New York carrying an unmarked brown paper bag in which lay the manuscript that her husband had described to his editor as a "time bomb." Is there a trace of Mrs. Nabokov in the novel? No, but her fingerprints are all over it. (Some people insisted on searching for her. After Lionel Trilling met the Nabokovs, in Ithaca, he told his wife he had a vague feeling that Véra Nabokov was Lolita.)

When Mrs. Nabokov appears in the fiction, she does so more often as her anti-self than as her actual self. The wives in Nabokov's work are more often women who got or get away: they are dead wives, fickle wives, lost wives, dimwitted, vulgar, slatternly, ineffectual, scheming wives. By comparison, Clare, in "Sebastian Knight," seems a later incarnation of a figure who appears in Nabokov's work beginning the year Véra and Vladimir met. In "Sounds," a short story of September, 1923, Nabokov introduces a radiant, delicate, thin-wristed woman with pale, dusty-looking eyes and hair that melts in the sunlight. That physical description applies equally to

Zina, in "The Gift," the first novel that anyone who knew the Nabokovs in Berlin will mention when Véra's name comes up. Nabokov's narrators can be ardent admirers of bright typists, of whom Clare's description surely most closely corresponds to Mrs. Nabokov:

> But best of all she was one of those rare, very rare women who do not take the world for granted and who see everyday things not merely as familiar mirrors of their own femininity. She had imagination—the muscle of the soul—and her imagination was of a particularly strong, almost masculine quality. She possessed, too, that real sense of beauty which has far less to do with art than with the constant readiness to discern the halo round a frying-pan or the likeness between a weeping-willow and a Skye terrier. And finally she was blest with a keen sense of humour. No wonder she fitted so well into his life.

Sibyl Shade resembles Mrs. Nabokov in superficial ways; a Véra double makes a cameo appearance on the arm of the author in "King, Queen, Knave." But only the "You"s of "Speak, Memory" and of "Look at the Harlequins!"—the "You"s of which Nabokov flatly refuses to speak—truly reflect his wife.

While Nabokov himself admitted that some kind of refracted picture of Véra often appeared in the mirrors of his works, Mrs. Nabokov categorically denied any resemblances. Of course I am not Zina, she would protest: Zina is only half Jewish, I am entirely Jewish. In the same way, Nabokov had a fondness for disclaiming any resemblance of his characters to himself: But he misidentified a butterfly—I would never do such a thing! But he speaks German better than French—therefore the character is not I! To complicate the issue, Mrs. Nabokov, so punctilious about everything concerning her husband, did her best to be vague, noncommittal, or flat-out inaccurate on her own count. When she was asked how she had met her husband, she was not beneath telling even a good friend, "I don't remember." On one occasion, when Nabokov began to reveal to an American scholar how he and Véra had met, Véra interrupted her husband's account with a fierce "Who are you, the K.G.B.?" Other wives have been exiled from the history books; this one energetically banished herself.

There is no need to labor the fictional correlatives—first, because while we are busy searching for Véra Nabokov in the novels we have this imposing version of him in her letters. And in life itself Nabokov was in many ways his own fictional counterpart. As one of his favorite publishers warned, "It is a false idea to imagine a real Nabokov." He invented himself, was constantly impersonating himself, was as much in life as on the page a performer performing, a conjurer conjuring. And the magician's act, as it developed over the years, required an assistant.

Resentment of Mrs. Nabokov accumulated in equal proportion to the mystique. Who was this "Grey Eagle" in the classroom, the students wondered, while the faculty—very much aware that Nabokov had no Ph.D., no graduate students, no freshmen, and, by the mid-fifties, enviably high enrollments—chafed at the husband-and-wife routine. When Nabokov was being considered for a job elsewhere—and he searched for one within years of arriving at Cornell—an ex-colleague discouraged the idea: "Don't bother hiring him; *she* does all the work."

Nabokov did nothing to check this kind of sniping. He told his students that Ph.D. stood for "Department of Philistines." He left office hours to Véra. And he treated even his own fine performances flippantly. When a friend insisted on attending one of his lectures, Nabokov conceded, "Well alright, if you want to be a masochist about it." His colleagues were jealous of the enrollments, mystified by the butterfly net, astounded by the loyalty of the wife. In this last, they echoed the sentiments of Edmund Wilson, who hated her exam administering and her general devotion. In his journal he griped, "Véra always sides with Volodya, and one seems to feel her bristling with hostility if, in her presence, one argues with him." Other writers' wives were asked pointblank why they could not be more like Véra, who was held up as the gold standard, the International Champion in the Wife-of-Writer Competition, as the novelist Herbert Gold has termed it.

It has been said that the Nabokovs refined their marriage into a work of art. More to the point, their marriage had been refined by the art of work. The business correspondence began to snowball after "Lolita," when Mrs. Nabokov

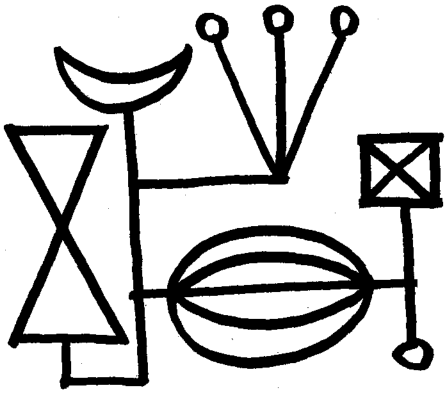
"I think we may be witnessing a defining moment in his presidency."

might write four letters a day to a single publisher. "I wrote you today but Vladimir asks me to do so again," she began a note to Putnam's in 1958. Many of these letters are layered like Neapolitan ice cream—in English, French, Russian. The typewriter went everywhere, not for him but for her. There is no evidence of such a thing as a vacation; Dmitri Nabokov observed, "Her attention span for pure amusement was quite limited." In the mid-sixties, when the Nabokovs travelled through Italy, Mrs. Nabokov negotiated a clause in a Putnam's contract from each town. After "Lolita," the public Nabokov, the voice of Nabokov, was Véra Nabokov's. The student who mentioned ventriloquism was not far off.

When Nabokov wanted information on the film version of "Lolita," he wrote to Stanley Kubrick several times. Vera signed one letter: "Vladimir asks me to tell you he will be glad to hear from you provided you don't mind talking to him though me." For some reason, VN also felt compelled to write himself, or as himself: "I would be glad to talk to you but I abhor telephone conversations, especially long distance. If you will talk to my wife I shall stay at her side during the talk." Nabokov would rarely come to the phone; word went out that he was being held hostage by his wife.

How, insofar as she recognized this, did she feel about it? She apologized to friends about the delays in writing, but rarely allowed apology to veer into complaint. Here she is in 1963, as close to the edge as she appears to have ventured: "I am completely exhausted by Vladimir's letters (I mean those he received and I have to answer) and it is not merely physical work but he also wants me to make all the decisions which I find more time-consuming than the actual typing. Even when Dmitri was very young and I had no help, I still had more leisure than I do now. Mind you, I do not complain, but I do not want you to think that I am merely lax." Usually, she stressed how unqualified she was for her job. Just after the publication of "Lolita," she wrote to a friend about the impossible pressure of work—especially, she said, because her husband refused to take the least interest in his own business matters. "Besides, I am by no means a Sévigné, and writing ten to fifteen letters in one day leaves me limp." Twenty-five years later, nothing having changed except the workload, she told the same friend that she was a very poor letter writer, had been all her life, yet for the last thirty or forty years had been doing nothing else. A little mournfully, she admitted at one point that all her grandchildren were literary. But she doted upon them, with meticulous attention. She worked harder and harder as the years went by. She corrected "Speak, Memory" in German, "Strong Opinions" in French, Nabokov's poetry in Italian, and then undertook a translation of "Pale Fire" into Russian after her husband's death. The last translation was difficult, she wrote friends, but at eighty she was alone and unwell, and the work made her happy. That year, she estimated for her lawyers that she was at her desk for six hours a day, on correspondence, negotiations, and translations. A few people had long realized how much she was working. In the early seventies, the critic Alfred Appel offered some advice: "You mustn't apologize for being behind in VN's correspondence. There is only one solution. Go on strike for better working conditions and hours. Walk in front of the Montreux Palace"—the hotel that was their home in Switzerland—"with a picket sign, something along the order of 'VN unfair to auxiliary services.' It would certainly have one kind of effect or another."

Of course, she did not do this; the personal letters are instead filled with concerns over how hard Nabokov is working, how difficult it is to prevail upon him to take a rest. And she *was* highly qualified for the job. Her Russian was—in her husband's estimation—"stupendous"; her memory for poetry was exceptional (among much else, she knew "Eugene Onegin" and virtually all of Nabokov's verse by heart); she was supremely sensitive to a well-turned sentence; she seemed to thrive on living a life outside her own. She was the ideal aide-de-camp in the war against *poshlost.* Like Nabokov, she experienced synesthesia, in their case the ability to see letters and visualize sounds in color. She was such a perfectly logical choice of a wife for Nabokov that the fact that he had married her for anything other than practical reasons was easily overlooked. She shared her husband's eye for detail: in his diary Nabokov frequently cited her poetic, offhand observations. Few saw this side of her. She allowed little of her charm onto paper; one had to gain her trust before witnessing the humor, the tenderness, the sprightly turns of phrase. (During a visit with friends at the Montreux Palace, Nabokov spooned sugar into his coffee but missed the cup. Brightly, Véra informed him, "Darling, you have just sweetened your shoe.") More often, people saw the fierce partisan, battling for literary credit in a world of philistines. She did not seem to be aware of the ill will, of her reputation as a dragon lady. If she knew that a shy, morbidly private, highly principled woman could easily appear prickly, aloof, and intransigent, she did not seem to care. The perfect magician's assistant, she could be sawed in half with no loss of dignity or composure.



Her lawyer was impressed when—in the dimly lit bar of the Pierre Hotel in 1967—she managed to bully her husband's American publisher into making unprecedented concessions. This she did without saying a word. The same lawyer thought her nearly clairvoyant when she insisted on cost-of-living increases in her husband's contracts—increases that proved highly lucrative. The lawyer had not been in Petersburg in the nineteen-tens or Berlin in the twenties; Mrs. Nabokov had. She was accustomed to having the bottom fall out of her world. For Nabokov, this left a mark on the fiction; for his wife it seems to have shaped a personality. For her, the trapdoors were very real.

Her frustrations were those of living an orderly life in a disorderly world, of producing perfectly set texts in a universe in which typesetters are human. She held people—herself especially—to the standards of her husband's literature: standards to which few of us, and even fewer publishers, rise. She and Dmitri allowed Nabokov what the world had tried to cheat him of: stability, privacy, an atmosphere of Old World taste and original humor, of strong opinion and exquisite, uncorrupted Russian. For many years, he was a national treasure in search of a nation; Véra was a little bit the country in which he lived. Together, they occupied an isolated kingdom of their own, the kind of world out of this world in which Nabokov's characters often find bliss. "Inseparable, self-sufficient, they form a multitude of two," one former Cornell student observed. What could have been more disorienting than that long Ithaca series of rented houses, with rented cats and rented silverware and rented family photographs? No wonder Nabokov treated it all as if it were unreal. It was. He was happy to insist on his isolation, to prove that he had been someone else's pipe dream. When one biographer presented him with a list of people he expected to interview, Nabokov annotated the list. The notes read, "Dislikes me personally / hardly know him / an enemy / knew him very little / unknown to me / knew him slightly / not sure ever met him / never met him / unknown to me / a cousin / a man of great imagination, who saw me last in 1916 / a figment of [your] imagination."

Back, then, briefly, to the Cornell classroom. We shall never know exactly what Mrs. Nabokov was doing there, just as we shall never know which was Flaubert's parrot. (She did own a gun, though there is no evidence of her having carried it to class; Nabokov was generally in robust health, and was not allergic to chalk dust. She was an encyclopedia, but so was he.) A hint of an answer may lie in "Bachmann," a 1924 short story. Bachmann's stellar career at the piano takes off the first day his admirer Mme. Perov sits down, "very straight, smooth-haired," in the front row of one of his concerts. It ends the first night she fails to appear, when, after seating himself at the piano, Bachmann notices the empty seat in the middle of the first row. One Cornellian appeared to appreciate Bachmann's secret in recalling the performances of Professor Nabokov. "It was as if he were giving the lectures for her," the student mused. Nabokov claimed that the best audience an artist can imagine "is a room filled with people wearing his own mask." Referring to Mrs. Nabokov, he told an interviewer, "She and I are my best audience, you see. I should say my main audience." For whom else could he have been speaking when one day he listed on the blackboard the names of the five greatest Russian poets? They included one named Sirin, his own pen name from the Berlin years. "Who is Sirin?" asked an intrepid student. "Ah, Sirin. I shall read from his work," Nabokov answered with a straight face and no further explanation. On a particularly dim Ithaca morning, Nabokov began lecturing in the dark. After a few minutes, Véra got up from her seat in the front row to turn on the amphitheatre lights. As she did, a beatific smile spread across her husband's face. "Ladies and gentlemen." He gestured proudly from the front of the room. "My assistant."

Probably the person who tried to become the most invisible was—to the man on the stage—the most visible. Surely she knew this. No one seems to have dared ask her if she felt oppressed, eclipsed—or, for that matter, central, indispensable, a full creative partner. She was too busy deflecting attention for anyone to get a chance to ask; the more you leave me out, she told one biographer, the closer to the truth you will be. She raised Being Mrs. Nabokov to a science and an art but pretended that such a person had never existed. She clearly felt that she stood not in her husband's shadow but in his light. When she met him, she felt that he was the greatest writer of his generation; to that single truth she held strong for sixty-six years, as if to compensate for all the loss and the turmoil, the accidents of history. One Cornell colleague noted in an article that when Mrs. Nabokov was forced to deliver her husband's lectures she modified not a word. In the margin, Mrs. Nabokov chastised him. But of course she had not changed a thing! Had he not understood that each lecture was a work of art?

An American admirer happened upon the Nabokovs in Italy in 1967. They were walking down a mountain trail, butterfly nets in hand. Nabokov was jubilant; earlier in the day, he had sighted a rare specimen, precisely the one he had been looking for. He had gone back to find Véra. He had wanted her to be with him when he made his capture. ◆

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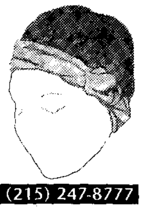

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PERSONAL HISTORY

TINKERING WITH DEATH

A death-penalty judge reflects: How does it feel to send another man to die?

BY ALEX KOZINSKI

1.

I WOKE with a start and sat upright in the darkness.

He must be dead by now.

The thought filled my head and gave me a weird sense of relief. But no, it couldn't be. The execution was set for Sunday morning at seven—long after daybreak. The display on the digital clock showed 1:23. I fell back on my pillow and tried to chase Thomas Baal from my mind.

I had first heard his name just three days earlier. My friend and mentor Supreme Court Justice Anthony M. Kennedy had mentioned during a telephone conversation that an execution was scheduled that night somewhere in my jurisdiction. As a judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, I hear cases from nine states and two territories spread over the Western United States and Oceania.

"Must not be mine," I told him, "or I'd have heard about it by now." And left for lunch. When I returned, the fax was chattering away.

"The clerk's office called," my secretary said. "Guess who's been drawn for that execution?"

"How can it be? A man is scheduled to die tonight and this is the first I hear of it?"

"He doesn't want a stay," my law clerk interjected. "I've been reading the documents and it looks like he's ready to swallow the bitter pill. It's his mom and dad who are trying to stop the execution. They say he's not competent to waive his right to appeal. The district court is holding a hearing even as we speak."

"Oh, good," I muttered. "Maybe the district judge will enter a stay."

"Fat chance," my secretary and my law clerk said in unison. "Better read those papers."

2.

AS I drifted back to sleep, I thought that Thomas Baal was not such a bad fellow compared with some of his neighbors on death row. On February 26, 1988, Baal had robbed thirty-four-year-old Frances Maves at knifepoint. Maves gave him twenty dollars, but Baal demanded more. She struggled. "You shouldn't have done that," Baal told her. "Now you pay. I sentence you to death." He stabbed Maves eight times.

I had seen my first death cases shortly after law school, when I clerked at the United States Supreme Court for former Chief Justice Warren E. Burger. That was almost two decades ago now, but I've never quite gotten over the experience. Whatever qualms I had about the efficacy or the morality of the death penalty were drowned out by the pitiful cries of the victims screaming from between the lines of dry legal prose:

> On the afternoon of May 14, 1973, defendant and three others . . . drove to the residence of Jerry Alday. . . . The defendant and one of his companions entered the mobile home for the purpose of burglary. Shortly thereafter two members of the Alday family, Jerry and his father, Ned Alday, arrived in a jeep, were escorted at gunpoint into the trailer, and were shot to death at close range with handguns. . . .
>
> Shortly thereafter a tractor driven by Jerry's brother, Jimmy Alday, arrived at the trailer. After being forced to empty his pockets, he was placed on the living room sofa and killed with a handgun fired at close range.
>
> While one of the four was moving the tractor out of the driveway, Jerry's wife, Mary, arrived at her home by car. . . . Two other members of the Alday family, Aubrey and Chester, Jerry's uncle and brother, arrived in a pickup truck. Mary was forced into the bathroom while Aubrey and Chester were taken at gunpoint into the bedrooms and shot in a manner similar to the first two victims. . . .
>
> Mary Alday was then raped by two or more of the men. . . . She was then taken, bound and blindfolded, in her car about six miles to a wooded area where she was raped by two of the men, was beaten when she refused to commit oral sodomy, and her breasts mutilated. She was then killed with two shots. Her watch was then removed from her nude body.

Sometimes the victims had tiny voices, barely audible as they endured fates so horrible that they defy human comprehension:

> Over the . . . latter portion of Kelly Ann's short, torturous life the defendant [her father] did these things to her on one or many occasions:
>
> 1. Beat her in the head until it was swollen.
> 2. Burned her hands.
> 3. Poked his fingers in her eyes.
> 4. Beat her in the abdomen until "it was swollen like she was pregnant."
> 6. Held her under water in both the bath tub and toilet.
> 7. Kicked her against a table which cut her head then . . . sewed up her wound with needle and thread.
> 9. On one occasion beat her continuously for 45 minutes.
> 13. Choked her on the night she died and when she stopped breathing . . . placed her body in a plastic garbage bag and buried her in an unmarked and unknown grave.

Brutal facts have immense power; they etched deep marks in my psyche. Those who commit such atrocities, I concluded, forfeit their own right to live. We tarnish the memory of the dead and heap needless misery on their surviving families by letting the perpetrators live.

Still, it's one thing to feel and another to do. It's one thing to give advice to a judge and quite another to *be* the judge signing the order that will lead to the death of another human being—even a very bad one. Baal was my first.

3.

ANOTHER start. The clock showed 3 A.M. Would this night never end? I knew I had done the right thing; I had no doubts. Still, I wished it were over.

The district court had made its decision around 6 P.M. Thursday. Yes, Baal was competent; he could—and did—waive his right to all appeals, state and federal. This finding was based on the affidavits of the psychiatrists who had examined Baal, and on Baal's courtroom responses:

The Court: Do you want us to stop [the execution], sir, to give you an opportunity to appeal . . . ?

The Defendant: No, I feel that I've gone through a lot of problems in there and I'm just—I feel that the death penalty is needed. And I don't feel that I have to stick around ten years and try to fight this thing out because it's just not in me.

The Court: You know that your act here in the Courtroom of saying, "Don't stop the execution," will result in your death. You're aware of that, are you not?

The Defendant: Yes. . . .

The Court: Now, you know that the choice that you're making here is either life or death. Do you understand that?

The Defendant: I understand. I choose death. . . .

The Court: Is there anything else?

The Defendant: Just bring me a hooker.

The Court: Obviously the court can't grant requests such as that. Any other requests?

The Defendant: Just my last meal and let's get the ball rolling.

In desperation, Baal's parents had submitted an affidavit from a psychiatrist who, without examining Baal, could say only that he *might* not be competent. The district judge didn't buy it. Stay denied.

The case officially landed in my lap just as I was leaving the office for dinner at a friend's house. I arranged with the two other judges who had been selected to hear the case for a telephone conference with the lawyers later that evening. Nothing stops the conversation at a dinner party quite like the half-whispered explanation "I have to take this call. It's a stay in a death case. Don't hold dessert."

Last-minute stay petitions in death cases are not unusual; they're a reflex. Except in rare cases where the prisoner decides to give up his appeal rights, death cases are meticulously litigated, first in state court and then in federal court—often bouncing between the two systems several times—literally until the prisoner's dying breath. Once the execution date is set, the process takes on a frantic pace. The death warrant is usually valid only for a limited time—in some states only for a single day—and the two sides battle furiously over that piece of legal territory.

DAVID MAZZUCCHELLI

If the condemned man (only one woman has been executed in the last thirty-five years) can delay the execution long enough for the death warrant to expire, he will have bought himself a substantial reprieve—at least a few weeks, sometimes months or years. But, if the state can carry out the execution, the game ends in sudden death and the prisoner's arguments die with him.

The first time I had seen this battle was in 1977, when a platoon of American Civil Liberties Union lawyers descended on the United States Supreme Court in a vain effort to save Gary Gilmore's life. Gilmore's case was pivotal to death-penalty opponents, because he would be the first to be executed since the Supreme Court had emptied the nation's death rows in 1972 by declaring all existing death-penalty statutes unconstitutional. A number of states had quickly retooled their death statutes, but opponents hoped to use procedural delays to stave off all executions for many years. Gilmore upset this calculation by waiving his appeals after he was found guilty.

Gilmore was scheduled to face the firing squad on the morning of January 17, 1977. Efforts to obtain a stay from the lower federal courts during the night had proved unsuccessful, and the lawyers brought a stack of papers to the Supreme Court Clerk's office. The Court was due to hear cases at ten, which was also when the execution was scheduled. In the hour before the Justices took the bench, Michael Rodak, the Clerk of the Supreme Court, carried the petition to them in their chambers—first to one, then to another. The Justices entered the courtroom at the stroke of ten, and Rodak hurried back to his office. A few minutes after ten, he placed a call to the state prison in Draper, Utah, where Gilmore was being held. He first identified himself with a password: "This is Mickey from Wheeling, West Virginia." He continued, "I've presented the stay petition to the Justices, and it was denied. You may proceed with the execution."

Rodak then fell silent for a few seconds as he listened to the response from the other end of the line.

"Oh. . . . You mean he's already dead?"

4.

So as not to wake my wife with my tossing, I went to the kitchen and made myself a cup of tea. As I sipped the hot liquid, I thumbed through the small mountain of papers that had accumulated over the past seventy-two hours.

With the stakes in death cases so high, it's hard to escape the feeling of being manipulated, the suspicion that everything the lawyers say or do is designed to entice or intimidate you into giving them what they want. Professional distance—the detachment that is the lawyers' stock-in-trade in ordinary cases—is absent in death cases. It's the battle of the zealots.

And it's not just the lawyers. Death cases—particularly as the execution draws near—distort the deliberative process and turn judges into advocates. There are those of my colleagues who have never voted to uphold a death sentence and doubtless never will. The view that judges are morally justified in undermining the death penalty, even though it has been approved by the Supreme Court, was legitimatized by the former Supreme Court Justices William J. Brennan, Jr., and Thurgood Marshall, who voted to vacate as cruel and unusual every single death sentence that came before the Court. Just before retiring, in 1994, Justice Harry A. Blackmun adopted a similar view, by pronouncing, "From this day forward, I shall no longer tinker with the machinery of death."

Refusing to enforce a valid law is a violation of the judges' oath—something that most judges consider a shameful breach of duty. But death is different, or so the thinking goes, and to slow down the pace of executions by finding fault with every death sentence is considered by some to be highly honorable. In the words of Justice Brennan, this practice "embod[ies] a community striving for human dignity for all, although perhaps *not yet arrived.*"

Judges like me, who support the death penalty, are swept right along. Observing manipulation by the lawyers and complicity from liberal colleagues, conservative judges often see it as their duty to prevent death-row inmates from diminishing the severity of their sentence by endlessly postponing the day of reckoning.

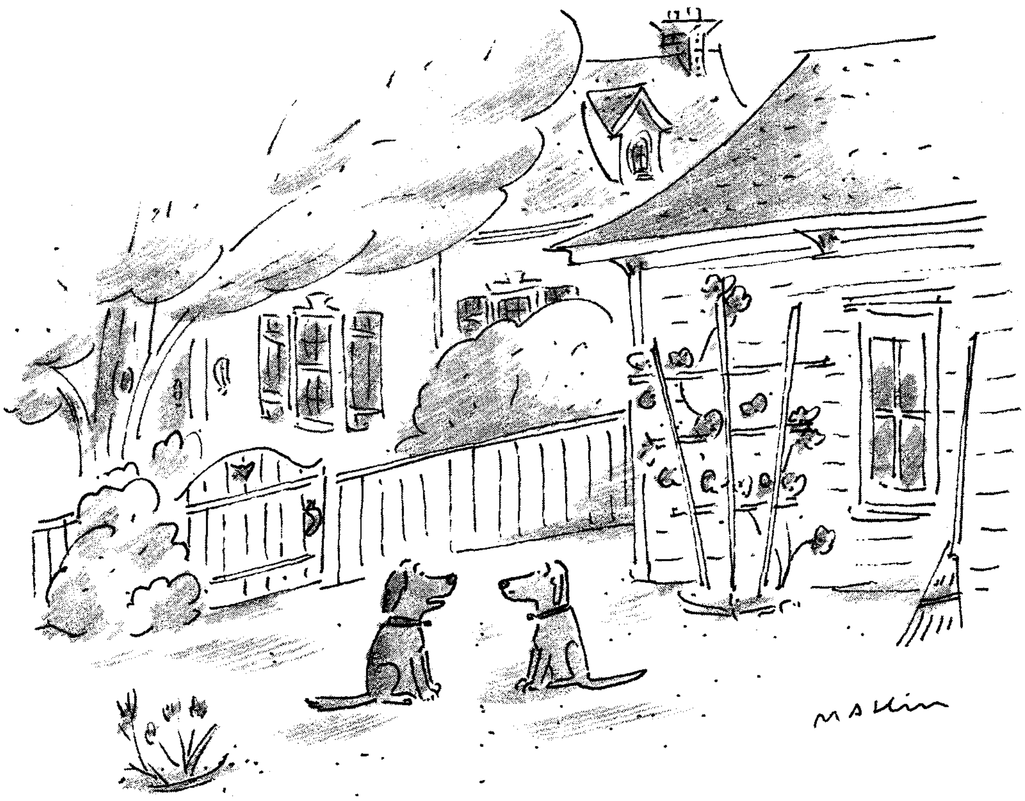
Armageddon on this question was fought in my court in 1992 when Robert Alton Harris became the first person to be executed in California since the days of Caryl Chessman. Harris killed two teen-age boys because he wanted to steal their car; he then finished off the hamburgers they had been eating. There was no doubt that Harris was guilty—he confessed the same day—yet he and his able lawyers managed to hold the executioner at bay for thirteen years, at a staggering cost to the taxpayers.

With his fifth scheduled execution days away, Harris brought two actions in federal court. In one, he claimed that, regardless of his guilt or innocence, the *method* that California had selected for executing him (lethal gas) was unconstitutional because it inflicted needless suffering. This claim was far from frivolous; another death-row inmate making the same argument later succeeded in closing California's gas chamber. (California now uses lethal injection.) But in Harris's case many judges of my court (I among them) thought there was no reason—other than the hope of manipulating us into granting a last-minute stay—that the claim had not been raised during the many years Harris had spent on death row.

Not all judges saw it that way. To give Harris time to litigate this claim—a process that would have taken years—various judges issued three successive stays in the hours preceding Harris's scheduled midnight execution, but the United States Supreme Court just as quickly lifted them. Finally, at about 3:30 A.M., Harris was taken into the gas chamber and strapped down to await the dropping of the sodium-cyanide pellets into the sulfuric acid—when his lawyers persuaded a judge of my court to issue yet a fourth stay.

Harris was unstrapped and escorted out of the gas chamber, but the reprieve was brief: less than two hours later, as a new day started in Washington, the Supreme Court lifted the stay in a brusque order that forbade any other federal court to interfere with the execution.

Much has been said about the Supreme Court's final order in the Harris case—one of my colleagues went so far as to accuse the Supreme Court of committing "treason to the Constitution"—but the drama had no other possible outcome. Harris and his supporters (both outside and within the judiciary) were bound and determined to keep California from jump-starting its death penalty. Eventually, the Supreme Court Justices, who had



"Sometimes a lick on the ear is just a lick on the ear—it doesn't always mean that all I'm interested in is sex."

held in numerous opinions that the death penalty is constitutional, said, "Enough is enough."

Harris was again subjected to the grisly gas-chamber ritual, and this time there was no reprieve. At 6:10 A.M., he inhaled the deadly gas as relatives of his victims watched from an observation room only six feet away.

Families of murder victims are among the most fervent supporters of the death penalty. They often use the press and political channels to agitate for the hasty demise of the monster who shattered their lives. Yet no one seems to have given serious thought to whether families are helped or harmed by the process, especially when it is long delayed. Does watching the perpetrator die help the families reach closure, or does the frustrated hope of execution in the face of endless appeals keep the psychological wounds open, sometimes for decades?

"He's not even in my type universe."

5.

ANOTHER hour passed, but sleep eluded me. Events of the last three days kept knocking around in my head.

Over my friend's kitchen telephone, the lawyers spoke with great urgency and took predictable positions. Afterward, my colleagues and I conferred. One of them—who has never seen a death sentence he liked—quickly voted to issue a stay. Almost instinctively, I took the opposite view. After some discussion, the third judge voted for a stay, and the execution was halted.

We spent all day Friday and most of that night preparing the stay order and my dissent. My colleagues argued that Baal's parents made a strong showing that he was not competent to surrender his life: he had a long history of "behavioral and mental problems," had attempted suicide on several occasions, and had been found to suffer from a variety of psychiatric disorders. Twice in the past, he had waived his legal remedies but had later changed his mind.

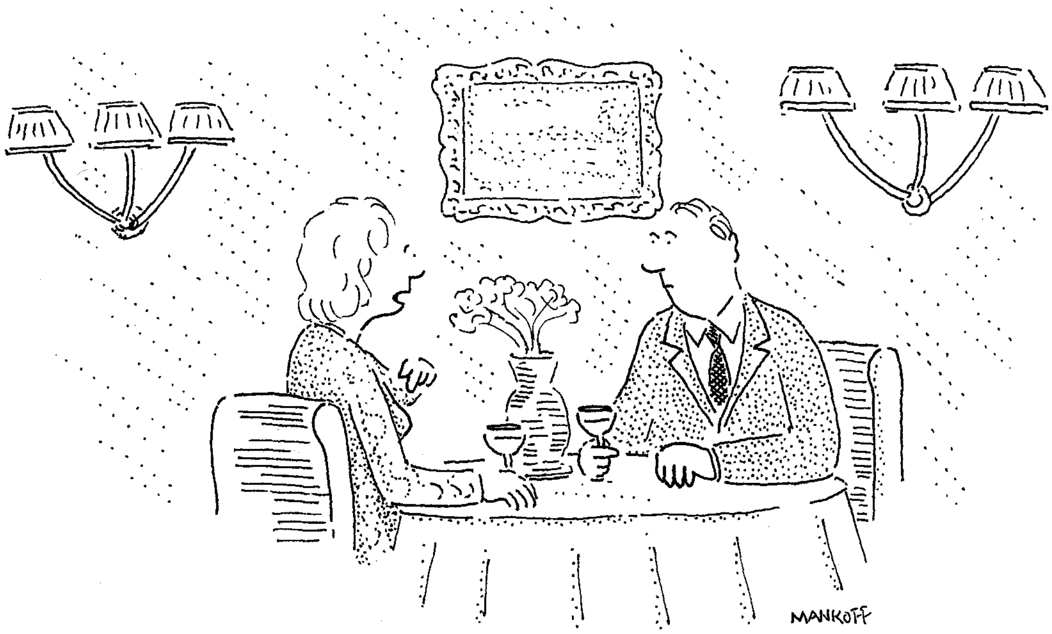
My dissent emphasized the diagnosis of the psychiatrists who had examined him; the state court's finding—just a week earlier—that he was competent; and Baal's lucid and appropriate answers to questions posed from the bench. I ended by arguing that Baal's decision to forgo the protracted trauma of numerous death-row appeals was rational, and that my colleagues were denying his humanity by refusing to accept his decision:

> It has been said that capital punishment is cruel and unusual because it is degrading to human dignity. . . . But the dignity of human life comes not from mere existence, but from that ability which separates us from the beasts—the ability to choose; freedom of will. *See* Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Pure Reason." When we say that a man—even a man who has committed a horrible crime—is not free to choose, we take away his dignity just as surely as we do when we kill him. Thomas Baal has made a decision to accept society's punishment and be done with it. By refusing to respect his decision we denigrate his status as a human being.

The idea that a long sojourn on death row is itself an excruciating punishment—and violates basic human rights—has gained some notable adherents. In 1989, the European Court of Human Rights refused to order the extradition of a man wanted for murder in the United States on the ground that the delay in carrying out death sentences in this country amounts to inhuman and degrading punishment. Four years later, the British Privy Council vacated a Jamaican death sentence because its imposition had been delayed for fourteen years. The Supreme Court of Zimbabwe reached a similar conclusion with respect to much shorter delays—delays that were, however, coupled with unusually harsh conditions of confinement.

This view has some important followers in the United States as well, notably Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens. Justice Stevens argues that such delayed executions violate the Constitution, because they serve no purpose. Living for twenty years under the terror of a death sentence is punishment enough, he argues; moreover, a death sentence so long delayed can have no deterrent value and is therefore capricious. No other Justice has yet embraced this view, but Justice Stephen G. Breyer has shown some sympathy.

There is a lot to be said, of course,



"It's not you, Frank, it's me—I don't like you."

• •

for the proposition that the death penalty ought to be carried out swiftly. But swift justice is hard to come by, because the Supreme Court has constructed a highly complex—and mutually contradictory—series of conditions that must be satisfied before a death sentence may be carried out. On the one hand, there must be individual justice: there can be no mandatory death sentence, no matter how heinous the crime. On the other hand, there must be consistent justice: discretion to impose the death penalty must be tightly circumscribed. But individual justice is inherently inconsistent—different juries reach different results in similar cases. And there are scores of other issues that arise in every criminal case but take on special significance when death is involved. Death, as liberal judges keep telling us, is different.

Not surprisingly, a good lawyer (with cover from sympathetic judges) can postpone an execution for many years. When Duncan Peder McKenzie reached the end of the road on May 10, 1995, he had been a fixture of Montana's death row for two decades. A total of forty-one state and federal judges had examined the case (many of them several times) and had issued two dozen published opinions analyzing various claims. In the end, McKenzie argued that he had suffered enough because of this delay and he should be forgiven his death sentence. We rejected this argument, and the Supreme Court refused to stay the execution, with Justice Stevens dissenting.

6.

Dawn broke as I drifted off into fitful sleep, but a part of me kept reaching out to the man I knew was living the last hour of his life. Awareness of death is intrinsic to the human condition, but what is it like to know precisely—to the minute—when your life is going to end? Does time stand still? Does it race? How can you swallow, much less digest, that last meal? Or even think of hookers?

Though I've now had a hand in a dozen or more executions, I have never witnessed one. The closest I came was a conversation with Bill Allen, a lawyer from my former law firm. I ran into him at a reception and his face was gray, his eyes—usually sharp and clear—seemed out of focus.

"Not well," Bill answered when I asked how he was doing. "I lost a client. His name was Linwood Briley. I saw him die in the electric chair a couple of days ago."

"Was it rough?"

"What do you think? It was awful."

"What was it like when they turned on the juice?"

"Oh, by the time they got done strapping him down, putting the goop on his head and the mask on his face, the thing sitting in that chair hardly looked human. But the really strange part was before: looking at him, talking to him, even joking with him, fully aware he'd be dead in half an hour."

"Why did you go?"

"I thought he should have a friend there with him in his final minutes."

The look on Bill's face stayed with me a long time. It was enough to persuade me that I'd never want to witness an execution. Yet I sometimes wonder whether those of us who make life-and-death decisions on a regular basis should not be required to watch as the machinery of death grinds up a human being. I ponder what it says about me that I can, with cool precision, cast votes and write opinions that seal another human being's fate but lack the courage to witness the consequences of my actions.

After filing my dissent, at 2:59 A.M. Saturday, I put Baal out of my mind, figuring that it would be quite some time before I'd have to think about him again. Much to my surprise, however, the Supreme Court issued an order that evening, lifting our stay. The execution was on. The Court had more or less adopted my reasoning—even cited me by name. I felt triumphant.

But, as Saturday turned to night, it began to sink in that Baal really *was* going to die, and that I would have played a part in ending his life. The thought took hold of my mind and would not let go. It filled me with a nagging sense of unease, something like motion sickness.

7.

I finally plunged into a deep sleep from which I awoke long after the execution was over. I was grateful not to have been awake to imagine in real time how Baal was strapped onto a gurney, how his vein was opened, how the deadly fluids were pumped into his body.

Lethal injection, which has overtaken the electric chair as the execution method of choice, is favored because it is sure, painless, and nonviolent. But I find it creepy that we pervert the instruments of healing—the needle, the pump, the catheter, F.D.A.-approved drugs—by putting them to such an antithetical use. It also bothers me that we mask the most violent act that society can inflict on one of its members with such an antiseptic veneer. Isn't death by firing squad, with mutilation and bloodshed, more honest?

8.

SOME three hundred and sixty people have been executed since Gary Gilmore. The most we have dispatched in any one year was fifty-six, in 1995. There are thirty-one hundred or so awaiting their date with the executioner, and the number is growing. Impatient with the delays, Congress last year passed the Effective Death Penalty Act, which will probably hasten the pace of executions. Even then, it's doubtful we have the resources or the will even to keep up with the three hundred or so convicted murderers we add to our death rows every year.

With the pace of executions quickening and the total number of executions rising, I fear it's only a matter of time before we learn that we've executed the wrong man. There have already been cases where prisoners on death row were freed after evidence turned up proving them innocent. I dread the day we are confronted with a case in which the conclusive proof of innocence turns up too late.

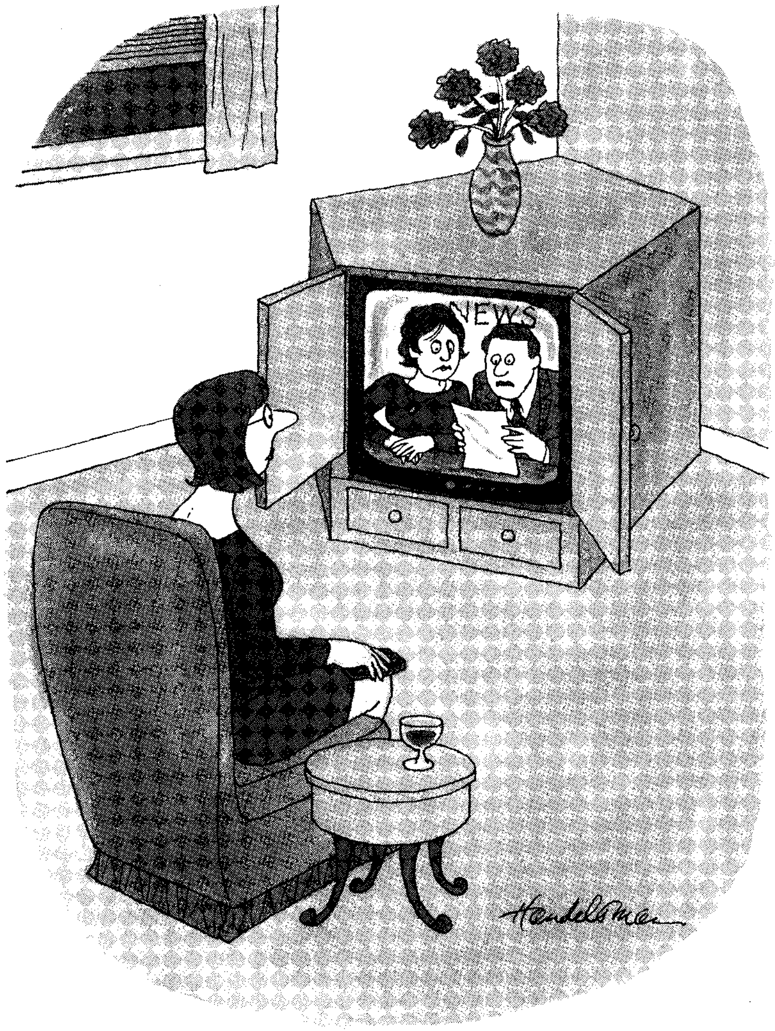
And I sometimes wonder whether the death penalty is not an expensive and distracting sideshow to our battle against violent crime. Has our national fascination with capital punishment diverted talent and resources from mundane methods of preventing violent crime? Take William Bonin, the notorious Freeway Killer, who raped, tortured, and murdered fourteen teen-age boys, then dumped their bodies along Southern California's freeways. If anyone deserved execution, surely it was Bonin. And on February 23, 1996, after fourteen years on death row, he went to his death, even then mocking the families of his victims. Asked if he had any regrets, the confessed killer admitted that, indeed, he did: "Well, probably I went in the [military] service too soon, because I was peaking in my bowling career. I was carrying, like, a 186 to a 190 average. . . . I've always loved bowling."

Yet, looking at the record in his case, one can't help noting that Bonin had given us ample warning of his proclivities. While serving in Vietnam, he had sexually assaulted at gunpoint two soldiers under his command. After returning to civilian life, he had been convicted of molesting four boys between the ages of twelve and eighteen. He had served three years for those crimes and, upon his release, molested another boy. Again, he had served only three years and had then been set free to commence his killing spree.

Bonin is not unique. My concurring opinion in his case lists a number of other killers who gave us fair warning that they were dangerous but were nevertheless set free to prey on an unsuspecting and vulnerable population. Surely putting to death ten convicted killers isn't nearly as useful as stopping a single Bonin before he tastes blood.

9.

IT'S late Saturday night. Another execution is scheduled for next week, and the machinery of death is humming through my fax. And, despite the qualms, despite the queasiness I still feel every time an execution is carried out in my jurisdiction, I tinker away. I do it because I have taken an oath. But there's more. I do it because I believe that society is entitled to take the life of those who have shown utter contempt for the lives of others. And because I hear the tortured voices of the victims crying out to me for vindication. ♦



"Here's a late bulletin. Wendy and I have been fired, so we'll just say goodbye and God bless."

A REPORTER AT LARGE

PERILS OF THE SPHINX

Why do so many people—in the midst of a scientific effort to save Egypt's enigmatic monuments—still go a little crazy over them?

BY ALEXANDER STILLE

SITTING at a computer terminal in Venice, California, I watched as the Great Sphinx at Giza took shape before my eyes. First, a scholar's careful measurements were transformed into an elaborate wire-frame model, which then grew a skin that showed us not the half-ruined Egyptian statue but the Sphinx as it may have looked at the time of its creation, forty-five hundred years ago, with its nose, its royal beard, and its headdress intact. Like a criminologist working from a skeleton, Tom Jaggers, an architect with the Jerde Partnership, had taken raw data about the modern Sphinx and used automated computer-aided design and some historical assumptions to create a digital version of the original Sphinx. At that moment, neither Jaggers nor I had seen the real thing.

Just a few miles away, at the Getty Conservation Institute, in Marina del Rey, technicians have compiled data from a fully automated solar-powered monitoring station placed behind the Sphinx, which measures wind direction, velocity, and relative humidity, in order to study erosion patterns of the ancient world's largest surviving colossal statue. In the basement of the Getty, men in white lab coats are testing perfectly airless environments for the preservation of the body of King Tutankhamun and his fellow-mummies at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, and the Conservation Institute has sponsored a virtual-reality reconstruction of the tomb of Queen Nefertari, in Luxor.

These technological marvels are helping to transform the way we study and preserve the historical past, but the reality on the ground in Egypt when I arrived there last fall looked rather different. The Great Sphinx was covered in scaffolding as Egyptian conservators worked to protect its lion body by encasing its lower third in newly cut limestone blocks—the latest in a series of attempts to save the Sphinx. The soft middle portion of its body continues to flake and chip into pieces that turn to a dust as soft as talcum powder when you rub them between your fingers. Slowly and relentlessly, the body is being eaten by wind and moisture, aided by the smog of Cairo, which now rivals Mexico City's as the worst in the world. Behind the rump of the Sphinx, the Getty's solar-powered monitoring device stood disconnected, tangled up in its own wiring. The Sphinx continues to stare impenetrably across the millennia, but its gaze is now trained at a Pizza Hut and Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise that has opened just two hundred yards in front of it. The urban sprawl of Cairo—whose population has risen from two million to seventeen million people in the last forty years—has reached the Pyramids and the paws of the Sphinx, bringing with it cars, sewage, polluted air, and fast-food culture.

"YOU have arrived in Cairo at a very bad time," an Egyptian voice explained to me in an ominous tone over the phone the day of my arrival at the Nile Hilton. "There has been a terrible theft at the Cairo Museum. They have just fired the head of the Supreme Council of Egyptian Antiquities." A thief had hidden inside a sarcophagus, had emerged after closing time and stolen several gold objects from the collection of King Tutankhamun, and had been arrested trying to smuggle them out the next morning. The Minister of Culture seized upon the incident as a reason to sack the director of antiquities, who was considered an open, likable person and had worked well with foreign archeologists in Egypt. His successor asserted his power by revoking many recent decisions and thundering against foreigners who used their work in Egypt to give their students Ph.D.s.

As I was to discover in the next few weeks, the deterioration and the conservation of antiquities is an extremely delicate subject in Egypt, and nowhere more

The Sphinx in 1854, half a century af

"SPHINX AND PYRAMID" (1854), BY JOHN BEASLY GREENE, GÉRARD LÉVY COLLECTION, PARIS

poleon's invasion. Egypt has served as a kind of Rorschach test on which each generation has imposed its own image.

so than at the Sphinx—national symbol of Egypt, tourist attraction, and world icon, in which almost all people feel they have a stake and a say. I headed out to Giza with Mark Lehner, a scholar who teaches at the University of Chicago and probably knows more than anyone else about the Sphinx—both as a monument and as the object of a political struggle.

We started in the confusion and traffic of downtown Cairo, crossed onto the west bank of the Nile, and proceeded south, a couple of miles inland from the river. "This was all farmland when I first came here, in 1972," Lehner said as we drove along the Pyramids Road, which is lined with cheaply built concrete high-rises that are badly dilapidated and black with soot. Although most of them are less than twenty years old, they are in considerably worse shape than the Pyramids, which began to appear majestically over rooftops crowded with satellite dishes. "Cairo is much more sophisticated and cosmopolitan," Lehner went on. "When I first came, I recall people gathering outside storefront windows, where you had a few imported things—silk ties from Italy, maybe, or a little can of Nescafé. Now we have McDonald's, satellite dishes, CNN, and David Letterman." As Egyptian society has opened up on some fronts, it has turned inward on others. Just in the last several years, there has been a proliferation of the veil traditionally worn by Islamic women, which in recent decades had gradually been disappearing from the streets of Cairo.

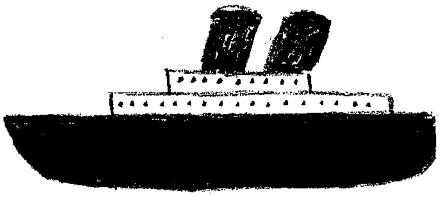
Lehner is a short, slight man of forty-six, with tortoiseshell glasses and thinning grayish hair, which give him a scholarly air. But he moves around in bluejeans and boots with the agile step of a man who has spent years working outdoors, clambering in and out of excavation ditches, crawling through narrow passageways. He wears a rakish green felt hat with a leather band that his academic colleagues kid him about, saying he is trying to look like Indiana Jones. Despite twenty-five years in Egypt and academe, he retains the flat, plain accent of the American Midwest and the colloquial informality of someone who grew up in the nineteen-sixties.

In 1979, Lehner became the field director of the American Research Center in Egypt's Sphinx Mapping Project—the first full-scale attempt to survey the colossus with special "photogrammetric" cameras, which measure and record with mathematical precision the volume of the objects they photograph. (The data and the images he collected became the basis for the computer reconstruction of the Sphinx that I had seen in California.) Over five years, he spent his days studying, drawing, photographing every inch of the Sphinx. "I spent weeks on top of the back of the Sphinx just doing hand-mapping of the outlines," he said. "I spent weeks on top of the paws, mapping all the stones in this area. I knew the Sphinx so well at that time I could go home at night and run all of this detail in my head, like a video, and think about it."

During his time on the mapping project, Lehner would eat a cheese sandwich for lunch in the shade of the monument and watch as chunks of limestone the size of large potato chips flaked off and fell to the ground. Moisture condenses on the Sphinx in the cool of the night and the early morning. Salt within the stone is drawn to the surface by the moisture and dissolves. When the dew burns off during the day, the salt crystallizes again, expanding and pushing at the surface with explosive force. Sometimes as the morning dew evaporates in the sun you can actually hear a popping sound when the salt hardens, pushing off layers of stone that then blow away in the wind. "So many of the details have changed," Lehner commented.

THE Sphinx and the Pyramids may be on Egyptian soil, but the vast majority of the people visiting them are Western tourists and archeologists who consider them to be a part of the collective cultural patrimony. The long history of colonialism continues to cast its shadow over the monuments. The modern field of Egyptology is a direct result of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, in 1798, and the country's antiquities service was directed by Frenchmen until 1952. Given this history, the Egyptians, though eager to have foreign money and expertise, are understandably anxious to control their archeological legacy, and are acutely sensitive to anything that they perceive as a slight to their national pride.

The Egyptians were stung by international criticism and a flurry of newspaper stories when large chunks of the Sphinx fell off in 1981 and 1988, and in each case the government responded by firing the director of Egyptian antiquities. To allay public fears, the government has undertaken major restoration work at the Sphinx, some of it doing more harm than good. Lehner was briefly banned from the site at Giza in 1982, when he was caught in the political crossfire that accompanied the first disastrous restoration.



Egypt has even had to contend with Islamic fundamentalists who have used the Sphinx and the Pyramids in their war on the current government. Eighteen Greek tourists visiting the monuments were killed last year by members of Gamaa al-Islamiya; this succeeded in scaring away millions of tourists and sending the economy into a tailspin from which it is just beginning to recover.

Now various New Age movements have descended on the Sphinx, claiming that it and the Pyramids are not Egyptian monuments at all but the legacy of a much older civilization that left them there twelve thousand five hundred years ago as a kind of coded message containing the deepest secrets of the universe. The New Agers are bombarding the Egyptian government with requests to drill and probe, in the hope that the sands of Giza will soon yield the answer to the riddle of the Sphinx.

As the foremost American expert on the Sphinx, Lehner has found himself in the middle of this latest controversy as well. He is both the bête noire and a particularly able critic of the New Agers, because he himself came from within their ranks. The son of a minister from Minot, North Dakota, Lehner fell under the sway of the writings of a visionary named Edgar Cayce, who died in 1945. Known as the sleeping prophet, Cayce was considered a healer, and went into trances during which he had visions of past lives and historic eras. Although he was a Christian, he believed in reincarnation and Atlantis, and ancient Egypt figured heavily in his rereading of history and in his prophecies for the future. The Atlantis myth has its origins in Plato, who tells the story of an island peopled by the children of the sea god Poseidon, which was sunk beneath the ocean by Zeus when its citizens made the mistake of waging war on the Athenians. Cayce believed that the people of Atlantis had taken refuge in Egypt and buried their most precious documents in a secret chamber—he called it the Hall of Records—under the paws of the Sphinx, which they built. Cayce claimed to have witnessed all this in a previous incarnation as the high priest Ra Ta.

In 1971, Lehner, a young seeker of twenty-one, hitchhiked from North Dakota to Virginia Beach to reach the headquarters of the Edgar Cayce Foundation, and travelled to Egypt with a group of Cayce followers a year later. He vowed on that first trip to return in order to find the Hall of Records that lay buried on the Giza Plateau. To aid him in his search, Lehner decided to study archeology and ancient Egyptian at the American University in Cairo. "I spent every free moment I had out at the Sphinx," he said. But Lehner could find no trace of the people of Atlantis, and all the hard data written on the stones of Giza indicated that the Egyptians had built their own monuments.

The turning point for Lehner was a project carried out in 1977 and 1978 by the Stanford Research Institute (now called S.R.I.) to probe the ground beneath the Sphinx in an electrical-resistivity survey. During this project, which was independent but funded in part by the Cayce Foundation, researchers placed electrodes in the ground to register empty spaces in the rock. They also drilled in several places where they had picked up signs of empty spaces in the rock. "When we did do the drilling, we saw nothing but anomalies in the rock, cavities that looked like Swiss cheese," Lehner told me. "I started having major doubts about the idea of there being major architectural structures there."

But the project also started Lehner moving in another direction. In order to prepare the ground for the resistivity study, he and a crew of seventy men did a thorough cleaning of the quarry ditch in which the Sphinx sits and of nearby temples. Lehner and an Egyptian colleague named Zahi Hawass made a careful examination of all the debris they found. Prone alongside the Sphinx's left hind paw, they even picked debris from a fissure that runs along the floor there. "Zahi and I found fragments of tools, Old Kingdom pottery, hammer stones made of diorite, which were used during the Old Kingdom to smooth away limestone—stuff that was obviously left by the people who had built the Sphinx," Lehner said.

Lehner got over his disappointment at not finding the Hall of Records, and gradually forged a career as an archeologist. "The ideas I came with from Cayce didn't really stack up with bedrock reality, but bedrock reality became very exciting," he said. "It was the excitement you get from the direct rapport with the data, with the thing itself."

"I don't have an answer, but you've sure given me a lot to think about."

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In 1984, Lehner began mapping the entire Giza Plateau. Two years later, he returned to the United States to get a Ph.D. in Egyptology at Yale, where his dissertation, on the Sphinx, was based on years of field work. "So much of Egyptology had grown up out of philology and art history, the study of texts and objects, which meant that a site like Giza still yielded an enormous amount of information by just looking at what's there—the geology, the stratigraphy, toolmarks in stone," he said.

The building of the Pyramids and the Sphinx was such a vast enterprise that people actually lived on them as they worked. They cooked meals, ate and drank, and probably shat on them. Lehner lived in similar intimacy with the Giza monuments for several years in the nineteen-eighties. He has slept inside the Great Pyramid, explored its remotest passageways. He has copied out the graffiti of the Pyramid builders and studied their careful chisel marks. He has picked from the mortar between the stones carbonized traces of heating fuel, pottery, and a foul-smelling powdery brown substance that is probably human feces. Because we are used to seeing the Pyramids and the Sphinx in photographs, we tend to think of them as unchanging cultural icons. There are cracks inside the Sphinx that are large enough for a man to enter; Lehner had himself lowered face first on a rope to explore a fissure in the ground next to the Sphinx, and found valuable archeological material. He even rediscovered a passageway inside the Sphinx that had been lost for several decades. In it he found a pair of old shoes belonging to a digger who had worked for the French in 1926 or 1927. This kind of experience has given Lehner a very particular perspective. "The Sphinx is not a thing—it is a monument undergoing constant change," he says. "Water moves through it, all kinds of organisms and animals live inside it. There are foxes living on

"I threaten her masculinity."

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top of the Pyramids." Understanding the Egyptian monuments as, in some way, living things may help us understand and accept that they are, in fact, gradually dying.

PART lion, part Pharaoh, part god, the Sphinx stands guard over the entrance to the Pyramid complex in the valley of the Giza Plateau. Although it is gigantic for a work of sculpture—some sixty-six feet tall and two hundred and forty feet long—when seen from a distance it is dwarfed by the three Pyramids that loom in the background. Throngs of tourists make their way down the road between the Pyramids and the Sphinx as Egyptians in long robes follow alongside selling Coca-Cola, postcards, Egyptian papyri, T-shirts, and camel rides. Bobbing above the crowd are the bright-colored umbrellas of the tour guides trying both to ward off the desert heat and to prevent their charges from becoming separated from the group.

As you face the Sphinx, the first and largest Pyramid, known as the Great Pyramid, appears over its left shoulder. Standing almost five hundred feet tall, nearly eight times as big as the Sphinx, it was built by the Pharaoh Khufu, known to the Greeks as Cheops, in about 2600 B.C. The other two Pyramids, built by his son and grandson, line up on a diagonal in diminishing size along the ridge, creating an architectural complex that is of unprecedented scale but surprising harmony. It has often been thought that these enormous mountains of stone built in the desert were meant to symbolize the ancient Egyptians' creation myth, according to which life came into being as a mound of earth rising out of the waters of chaos, like land reappearing after the flooding of the Nile. Originally cased in hard limestone—almost all of which was stripped off and reused by the Muslims for buildings in Cairo—the Pyramids were meant to blaze in the sun, evoking perhaps the ancient Egyptian association between the Pharaohs and the sun god Ra.

The Sphinx lines up in the middle of the three Pyramids, leading most scholars to believe that it was built by Khafre, the Pharaoh of the second Pyramid. Khafre's Valley Temple—which served as the gateway to the Pyramid—sits right next to the Sphinx's own temple. At the time of the equinoxes the setting sun lines up exactly at the corner of Khafre's Pyramid and the right shoulder of the Sphinx.

This view of the Sphinx has not changed since Pharaonic times. When you face it and look out beyond the Pyramids, the only thing you can see is the Sahara Desert stretching all the way to Libya. But to your back—in an area that used to be wilderness—is the main street of Nazlet-el-Saman, with its shops and fast-food restaurants. The village is now a city of three hundred thousand. Because it was an improvised, illegal community, which sits on what is officially archeological land, it had no proper drainage system, and its sewage for many years seeped into the ground a few hundred yards from the Sphinx. The Egyptians (with American foreign-aid money) have installed a sewage system, tacitly acknowledging that the "village" is there to stay. With several hundred thousand people already living in shantytowns in the cemeteries of Cairo, the government is unlikely to displace people to respect the original boundaries of the archeological site.

A little more than five thousand years ago, the Nile's annual flooding allowed the ancient Egyptians to create a society of unprecedented wealth and stability. But at the apogee of its glory the population of ancient Egypt was relatively small: between one and two million. Modern Egypt must try to feed and house some sixty-four million people on the same thin strip of green land that cuts through the desert. Egypt is a nation running faster and faster just to keep pace. Between 1951 and 1979, university enrollment increased by fourteen hundred per cent, but fifty-two per cent of the country is still illiterate. Food production has tripled, but Egypt, once known as the breadbasket of Europe, can no longer feed itself, and imports seventy per cent of its food. A few years ago, the Egyptian government began to build a ring road about two miles from the Pyramids to relieve traffic congestion in Cairo—a development that would surely have destroyed what is left of the desert panorama around the monuments. "That would have been the end," Lehner said. "It's the last refuge. If they put the road in, the Sphinx and the Pyramids would be like the Acropolis in Athens—an island in a city." Responding to an international outcry about the highway, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak cancelled the project, on which millions of dollars had already been spent. There are rumors, however, that the Egyptians intend to revive the project.

THE Sphinx, standing more than ten times our height, seemed to grow larger as we approached it. As we entered the site, the Egyptians working on the scaffolding of the Sphinx greeted Lehner warmly and began animatedly discussing their work with him in Arabic. As we stood talking, another group of workmen arrived, carrying a half-ton limestone block suspended by rope from a long plank that rested on their shoulders. Seeing them skillfully maneuver this piece of stone up the levels of the wooden scaffolding with the simplest possible technology, I felt as if we were back in the Pyramid age.

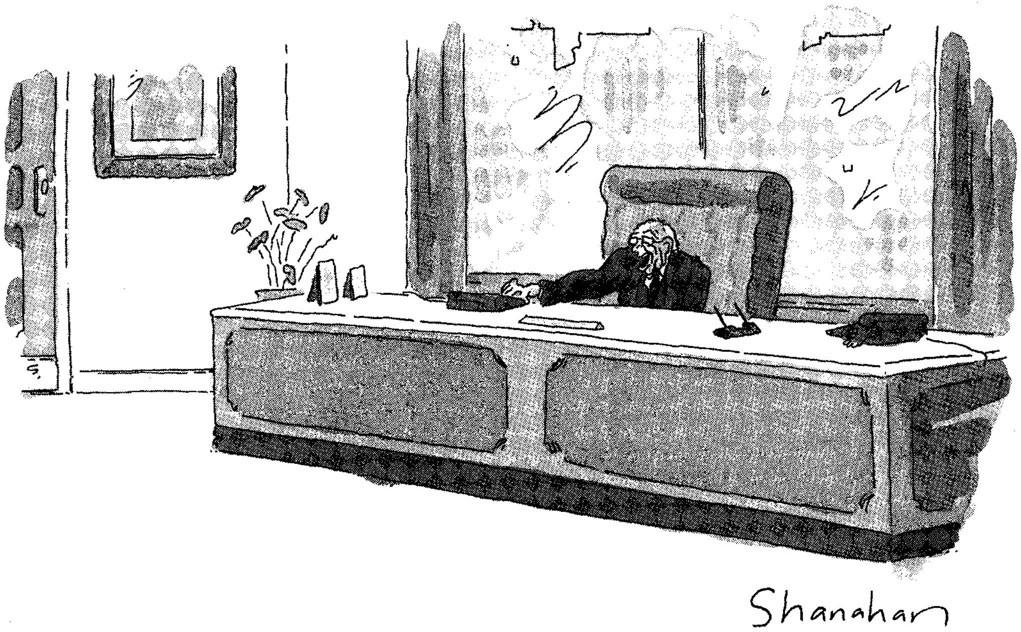
As we looked closely at the surface of the Sphinx, I suddenly realized what it was originally: a wall of limestone. Its enormous bulk was carved directly out of the vast limestone quarry that served to build the Pyramids. Its head, in the likeness of a Pharaoh, is made of the highest-quality and hardest stone, and so it is the best-preserved part of the statue. The middle portions of the lion body are made of much softer stone, some of which is so fragile you can scrape it right off, which Lehner illustrated by taking his fingernails to an enclosure wall just opposite the Sphinx. Still embedded in the Sphinx and the quarry wall are fossils of spiral-shaped shellfish and oysters, as well as patches of pocked and spongy-looking rock that are impressions left by coral—memories in stone from the time the entire area was under water. "This was a coral reef at the bottom of the sea," Lehner said, plucking fossils out of the soft yellow stone of the quarry wall and explaining that, during the Eocene age, the waters receded to reveal the Giza Plateau as we see it now. The stone of the Sphinx is about fifty million years old: an age that makes ancient Egypt seem like an extremely recent event and the fierce debate over the Sphinx's builders a matter of only relative importance.

"THE Sphinx has been a political football from ancient times to the present," Lehner said. Still propped up in front of the statue is a red granite slab erected in 1401 B.C. by a Pharaoh of the New Kingdom, King Thutmose IV, taking credit for its first major restoration. Its hieroglyphs tell the story of how, as a young prince, Thutmose stopped and took a nap near the Sphinx, which then spoke to him in a dream, promising him that he would be king of Egypt if he cleared away the sand and restored its damaged body. Some scholars believe that Thutmose may have killed his older brother in order to ascend to the throne, since he was not first in line to become king. Whatever the case, one thing is certain: Thutmose restored the Sphinx and put up his plaque to show that the Sphinx had given its blessing to the new Pharaoh. He had the Sphinx clad in large limestone blocks to protect it from wind erosion—a strategy the Egyptian workmen we saw hoisting the huge limestone block were trying to follow now, thirty-four hundred years later.

The Sphinx is so old that it forces us to reconsider our notions of what is ancient and what is modern, what is an original work of art and what is a restoration. Even for Thutmose, living in 1401 B.C., the Sphinx was already extremely ancient: it was to him older than the cathedral of Chartres is to us today.

The Greeks and the Romans visited and restored the Sphinx in the same spirit of wonder at the achievements of a vanished civilization as we do, and left graffiti on the walls of monuments like many modern tourists. The Romans cleared the sand from the Sphinx in preparation for a visit by Nero—for whom the Sphinx was far more ancient than Nero's Rome is for us—and dragged numerous obelisks back to Italy as symbols of their imperial power, as Napoleon did centuries later, when he invaded Egypt. The Sphinx was up to its neck in sand when Napoleon arrived and caused Europe to "discover" ancient Egypt. Although the Sphinx and the Pyramids were not technically "lost," as so many other monuments were, European writings about ancient Egypt had remained frozen since the time of the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, who had visited Egypt in the fifth century B.C. His book was still the standard travel guide in the nineteenth century, when a new wave of visitors began producing new literature.

Foreign explorers and adventurers competed in a mad scramble to dig up and drag home ancient treasures, filling the museums and collections of Europe and of the United States. But the Rape of the Nile, as it has been called, also revolutionized our understanding of ancient Egypt. Along with hauling away obelisks, Napoleon's troops dug up the Rosetta stone, which allowed Jean-François Champollion eventually to decipher the hieroglyphs, unlocking three thousand years of Egyptian texts and inscriptions. Then, in the eighteen-forties, French explorers finally freed the Sphinx from the sand, waking it from its long sleep; ironically, their interest caused the process of deterioration that had begun in ancient times to resume, for the clock began to tick again once the Sphinx was uncovered. "In physics, we have the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, which says that we change what we observe," Lehner said. "Some-



"Ms. Howard, get me some connective tissue."

thing similar happens in archeology: You study it, you kill it."

Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam, announced at the Million Man March, in 1995, that Napoleon had knocked the nose off of the Sphinx because he could not stand the idea that a work of such greatness was created by black people. Napoleon, though guilty of much looting and plunder, is innocent of this particular crime: eighteenth-century engravings of the Sphinx show it already missing its nose. Arabic documents from the fifteenth century recount that local Islamic leaders felt it necessary to deface the great statue because ordinary Egyptians of the period were still paying homage to it a millennium and a half after the collapse of the Pharaonic dynasties.

As Farrakhan's remark makes clear, the need to appropriate these iconic monuments and their history continues today. Modern American culture seems unusually fixated on ancient Egypt. A recent megahotel in Las Vegas is the Luxor, built in the form of a pyramid with a Sphinx as its entrance. A pyramid is the symbol of the Internet service America On-Line, illuminated by a bolt of lightning every time a subscriber logs on. There are hundreds of Web sites dedicated to ancient Egypt; many of the Pharaohs whose tombs were long ago raided have achieved in digital form a measure of the immortality they sought. Some of these sites contain valuable information, but an astonishing number are dedicated to bizarre theories about ancient Egypt, making it difficult for the uninformed browser to disentangle fantasy from reality.

One Web site purports to establish a connection between the monuments of ancient Egypt and the planet Mars. With the help of "computer-enhanced photographs," its author perceives on the surface of Mars a lion-shaped figure that resembles the Sphinx. Another, called the Pyramid's Amazing Chronography, insists that the Giza complex was built by the God of the Old Testament, because "the Bible makes it abundantly plain that Noah's son Ham was the father of Egypt." The most popular New Age theory these days is that the Sphinx was built by a vastly superior previous civilization that disappeared mysteriously, leaving behind the Pyramid complex at Giza as a kind of coded message for later generations—a revival of the old Atlantis myth. Cashing in on this trend, the sci-fi movie "Stargate" portrayed the Pyramids and the hieroglyphs as the key to a hidden passageway through space and time, created by powerful extraterrestrials.

A new book called "The Message of the Sphinx," by the best-selling authors Graham Hancock and Robert Bauval, has found a ready market among gullible people inclined to believe in a lost civilization that buried the secret to life under the sands of Giza. The book presents as disinterested questions a series of outrageous assumptions that Hancock, a British journalist formerly with *The Economist*, is at first careful not to endorse outright. "Is it possible that men and women of great wisdom and learning cast a 'glamour' over the Giza necropolis at some point in the distant past? Were they the possessors of as yet unguessed-at secrets that they wished to hide here? . . . Has the ancient Egyptian royal cemetery at Giza veiled the presence of something else—something of vastly greater significance for the story of Mankind?"

"The Message of the Sphinx" answers these questions with a resounding yes, arguing that the monuments of Giza are a kind of astronomical code containing the secret to "the true 'science of immortality' . . . the quest for eternal life." Hancock and Bauval dedicate an entire chapter to attacking Lehner as an apostate who left the New Age cause.

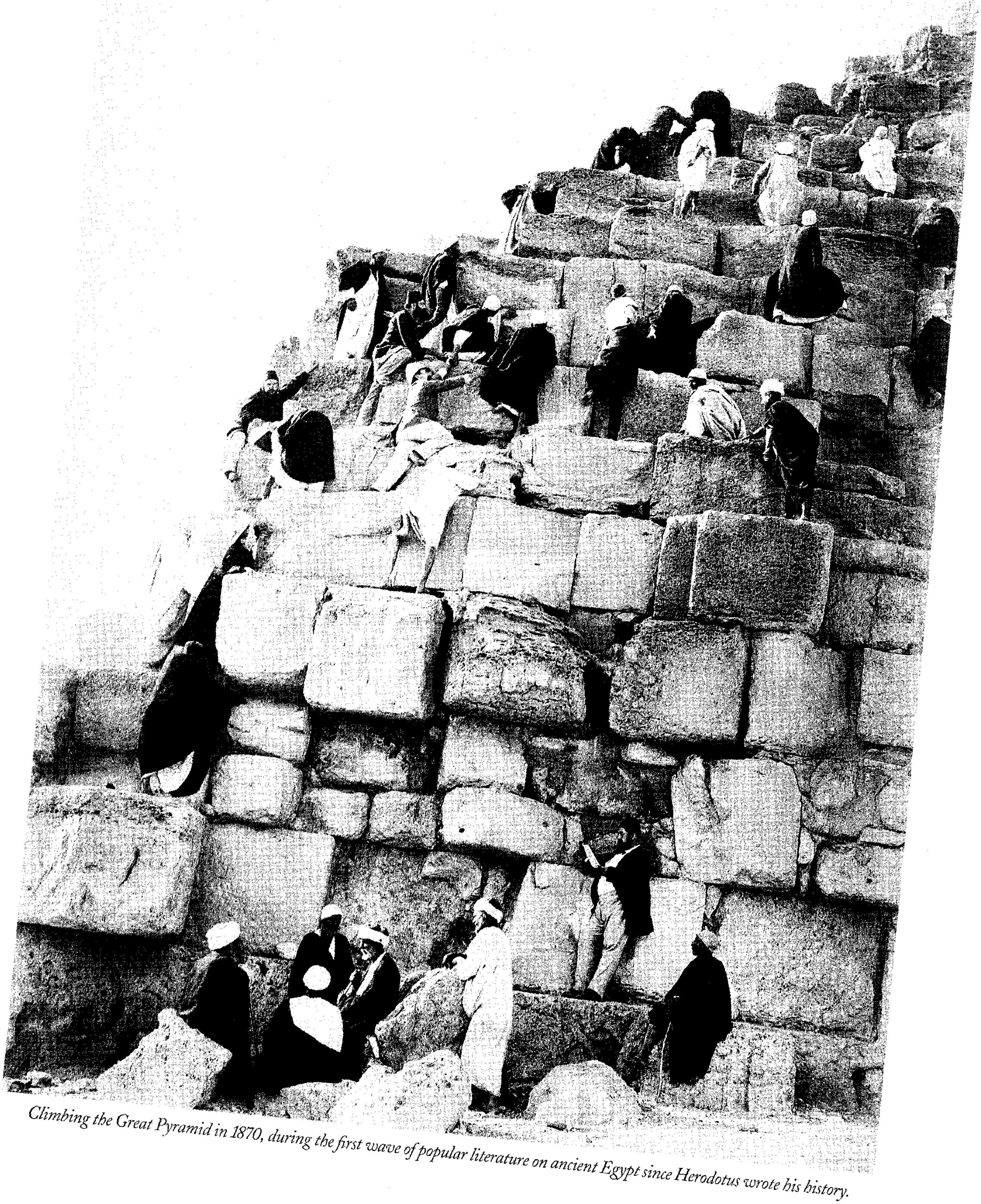
Making aggressive use of pseudoscientific methods and the Internet, the New Agers are changing the way Egyptian monuments are seen by hundreds of thousands of tourists. As the rich historical context and the subtle details of the archeological record fade and crumble, leaving only the bare outlines of great monuments, it becomes easier to rewrite history and impose our own fantasies on it.

One problem that invites historical distortion is that the Sphinx cannot be dated with mathematical accuracy. Only organic material—such as bones or wooden implements—can be carbon-dated, and the Sphinx is made of solid stone. In 1992, a respected geologist at Boston University, Robert Schoch, announced that weathering patterns on and around the Sphinx led him to revise the date of its creation from 2600 B.C. to at least 5000 B.C. He had based his dating on the rounded, highly eroded weathering patterns found primarily on the right flank of the Sphinx and on the wall next to it. That, Schoch said, had the look of stone that had been eroded by water rather than wind. And since the Sahara Desert dried up sometime between 6000 and 5000 B.C., the Sphinx, he concluded, must have been carved before that.

As Schoch acknowledged, dating rocks simply on the basis of weathering patterns is an extremely imperfect science. Dozens of other geologists who have spent much more time studying the Giza Plateau disagree with him, insisting that there are many processes of erosion that can account for the weathering patterns that Schoch was focussing on. But perhaps the most troubling part of Schoch's work is his inability to provide any kind of historical data to back up his hypothesis. Unlike the New Age mystics, Schoch knows that in order to be taken seriously in the scientific community the dating of a statue cannot be based on the look of its surface. There had to have been real human beings around, and an organized civilization, capable of carving a two-hundred-and-forty-foot-long, sixty-six-foot-high sculpture. Schoch acknowledges that no evidence of any such people or civilization exists in Egypt in the period he dates the Sphinx to (the sixth to eighth millennium B.C.). In fact, there is no evidence of stone-carved temples or colossal statuary anywhere in the world before Egypt in the third millennium B.C.

That the total lack of historical evidence invalidates Schoch's date was obvious even to John Anthony West, one of the main proponents of the Atlantis theory, and a popular mystical author who leads metaphysical tours of Egypt. West used Schoch's conclusions to push his own, even more improbable theory. "If the Sphinx was as recent as 7000 to 5000 BC," he writes, "I think that we probably would have other Egyptian evidence of the civilization that carved it." Since there is no such evidence for Schoch's date, West reasons, the Sphinx must be several thousand years older still. "The missing other evidence is, perhaps, buried deeper than anyone has looked and/or in places no one has yet explored," he writes. The logic of this is truly breathtaking: the date of 7000-5000 B.C. cannot be accepted because there is no evidence of high culture in Egypt, so West proposes a date for which there is even less evidence, at least 10,500 B.C. or earlier—an era in which there is no evidence of complex civilization anywhere on the planet. Welcome to the world of Atlantis. Nonetheless, West was able to produce a film promoting this "discovery," narrated by

PHOTO BY HENRI BÉCHARD, ALAIN D'HOOGHE COLLECTION, BRUSSELS



Climbing the Great Pyramid in 1870, during the first wave of popular literature on ancient Egypt since Herodotus wrote his history.

the actor Charlton Heston, which NBC broadcast. Egyptologists were annoyed that they weren't given airtime for rebuttal.

By portraying Egyptian civilization as an encoded legacy from a previous, superior culture, the New Agers have reduced the ancient Egyptians to the role of caretakers and dupes, blindly copying the symbols of somebody else's great monuments, generation after generation, without understanding their true significance. "We would be surprised if the owners of many of the coffins and tomb walls . . . had even the faintest inkling that specific astronomical observations and directions were being duplicated at their expense," Hancock and Bauval write. Thus most of Egyptian civilization, as the Egyptians themselves understood it, is reduced to filler in which to hide the secret message.

In his years at Giza, Lehner has seen and heard it all. In the nineteen-eighties, he met the actress and mystic Shirley MacLaine, who spent the night meditating inside the Great Pyramid. She believed that the Giza complex was built in 70,000 B.C.—a period when the Neanderthal was just coming into his prime—and that there was a giant crystal pyramid buried under the Great Pyramid. As MacLaine and Lehner stood at the base of the Pyramid, he pointed out that the ground beneath the structure was solid bedrock, so it was impossible for another pyramid to be underneath it. "Mark, it's all a matter of perspective," she replied. "I've been in the acting business a long time, and if there's one thing I've learned it's that it's all a matter of perspective."

One source of consolation may be that many of the absurd ideas about ancient Egypt are not entirely the invention of our own fatuous contemporary culture. Every American dollar bill carries the image of a pyramid with an eye at the top—the Freemasons' symbol. For some two hundred years, scores of authors (known within Egyptology as "pyramidiots") have devised fanciful numerological interpretations of the Pyramids, based on inaccurate measurements of monuments whose dimensions have been significantly reduced by looting and by quarrying. In the nineteenth century, such interpretations generally had a Christian twist, arguing that the Jews of the Old Testament built the Great Pyramid in anticipation of the ultimate truth of the Gospel of Christ. Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormon religion, claimed that his Book of Abraham was a translation of an ancient papyrus he had bought, along with four Egyptian mummies. When scholars figured out how to decipher hieroglyphs, it turned out that Smith's "translation" bore no relationship to any actual text but was purely the product of his inspired imagination. Nowadays, in any New Age bookstore, you can find a shelf full of books on "pyramid power" and the Sphinx. Ancient Egypt has served as a kind of Rorschach test on which each generation has imposed its own image.

THE man at the vortex of all Sphinx controversies—from its conservation to its New Age "redating"—is Zahi Hawass, who is now director of the Pyramids. He and Lehner are close friends and colleagues, who have worked together for twenty years. After Lehner and I presented ourselves to a group of armed guards near the Great Pyramid, we were led to Hawass's office, in a low-lying concrete bunker tucked behind a sand dune—a small, air-conditioned oasis on the Giza Plateau.

A burly, powerfully built man of forty-nine, with close-cropped hair and a supremely confident, commanding manner, Hawass looks more like an army general than like an academic. With a handsome, broad, copper-colored face, severe black eyebrows, dark eyes, and a hawklike nose, he bears a strong resemblance to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, whose photograph hangs on the wall directly behind him. On the side walls are photographs of Hawass with Hillary and Chelsea Clinton on their recent visit to the Pyramids. He has an undergraduate degree from Alexandria University and a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania, having successfully navigated both the murky waters of Egyptian cultural politics and American academic circles.

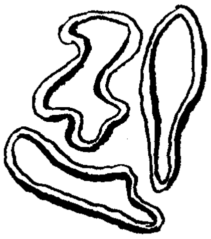
Hawass's office is a center for archeological activity in northern Egypt. When we arrived, he was meeting with two British archeologists, the phone was ringing constantly, his assistants were popping in and out with questions, and the head of an expedition from the University of Pennsylvania paid a call. Hawass was in a dark mood about the New Agers. In his hand, he held a thick sheaf of paper—attacks on him printed out from the Internet.

"Don't forget to torch the place when you leave."

The Atlantis theory is only one of many problems that Hawass must contend with. He is responsible not only for Giza but for the equally important pyramids, temples, and tombs at the nearby sites of Saqqara, Dashur, and Abusir. He has monuments that receive too much attention from tourists and treasure seekers, and hundreds more that are severely neglected. He is in charge of the controversial restoration of the Sphinx, and must try to protect hundreds of other less famous and equally vulnerable monuments. He must try to reconcile the often conflicting interests of tourists, local residents, foreign archeologists, and conservators, and also the various constituencies within the Egyptian government. He is fighting a regular pitched battle with the local camel drivers who offer rides to tourists visiting the Pyramids: Hawass wants them to operate out of a nearby stable so that the animals do not leave their dung all over the site and add to the general wear and tear of the monuments, but in a country where unemployment is twenty-one per cent and the average annual income is about seven hundred dollars any move that interferes with people's livelihood is politically explosive. So far, the camel drivers seem to have prevailed; they and their animals were everywhere when I visited Giza.

The Pyramids may be the world's most durable monuments, but even they present serious conservation problems. "We have an Arab expression that says, 'Man fears time, but time fears pyramids,' " Hawass said. "We found out that that wasn't true. Even the Pyramids need to be protected." He shut the Great Pyramid for half of 1988, because of the deteriorating condition of the inner chambers. Moisture from the breath and sweat of tourists moving through the close, narrow corridors was creating salt crystallization, which was eating away at the rock surface. "The Pyramids began to be killed," he said.

Hawass explained that he had recently enlisted the aid of the German Archeological Institute in Cairo to help with the conservation work, and the Germans hired an engineer from Munich to build a robot that could move up the narrow corridors within the Pyramids, some of which are only about ten inches wide. This innovative use of technology was at least in part a success: it allowed Hawass to install a ventilation system in the Great Pyramid and explore remote passages. But the German technician, Rudolf Gantenbrink, who was directing the robot, got it into his head to play amateur archeologist and found himself allied with the New Agers. At the end of a long stone shaft, the robot, equipped with a video camera, allowed Gantenbrink to see two copper objects that looked like door handles. Unbeknownst to the German Archeological Institute, Gantenbrink released the video to the press and announced the discovery of a hidden chamber. New Agers seized on the find as the possible answer to the mysteries of Egyptian—or, perhaps, Atlantean—civilization. The German Archeological Institute and the Egyptians were irritated by Gantenbrink's publicity stunt and by his speculation about a discovery that had not been adequately studied. Hawass and the Egyptian government have rejected Gantenbrink's requests to make further explorations of the Pyramids.



"We cannot permit expeditions by private individuals or amateurs," Hawass said. "Our law permits only scholars and institutions. When Gantenbrink came here, he was a member of an expedition. Then he went everywhere in the world, announcing this discovery without telling anyone in the German Institute. People use science for their own benefit. People come to the Pyramids and they get crazy."

Egyptian pyramids and tombs are full of false doors, precisely because they were designed to confuse intruders; there is no reason to expect that this copper handle—whether or not it opens a door—will lead to anything otherworldly. But the fact that the Egyptians would not let Gantenbrink continue with his work has led New Agers to suspect that there is a coverup, and that the copper handle may be the Stargate they have been looking for.

The copper-handle incident, combined with the "redating" of the Sphinx, has sent the New Agers into a state of fibrillation. They are bombarding Hawass with requests to drill and probe underneath and around the Sphinx, believing that revelation is at hand. Edgar Cayce, the sleeping prophet, predicted that the rediscovery of the great Hall of Records would bring about the Second Coming in the year 1998. And the authors of "The Message of the Sphinx" have further inflamed such messianic hopes. "If we read the message . . . right," they conclude, "then there is something of momentous importance there, waiting to be found—by seismic surveys, by drilling and excavation. . . . It could be the ultimate prize."

"What do you think the reaction of the American government would be if we put in a request to excavate underneath the Statue of Liberty on the theory that the ancient Egyptians discovered America?" Hawass asked me.

As we walked around the site, Lehner's New Age past kept sticking to him like gum to the bottom of a shoe. As we walked down the causeway of Khafre's Pyramid toward the Sphinx, we were stopped by two Italian tourists, father and son, who were under the sway of "The Message of the Sphinx."

"You are Graham Hancock," the father said. "We saw the video." Evidently, the man had seen Lehner rebutting Hancock's theory and confused the two.

"No, I'm one of his critics," Lehner replied.

A long debate ensued, in which Lehner patiently refuted Hancock and Bauval point by point. Eventually, the father gave up, and simply said, "But, you know, there is something mysterious. There is something mysterious here."

"That's exactly what the Pharaoh wanted people to think," Lehner replied. "They didn't want people to think it was a human monument. Let me ask you: why is it so important for people like you to believe that it was not these human beings here in Egypt who made them, but people who are lost? Do you know the movie 'The Wizard of Oz'? Do you remember the end, when they want the answers from the big and powerful wizard? But then the dog goes behind the curtain and it's just a little man, see? People want mystery."

We had a similar experience when we went into the Tree of Life Bazaar in the village square just opposite the Sphinx. The shop, which sells exotic Egyptian perfumes, is filled with photographs and cards from American New Agers. Lehner is an old friend of the family that runs the shop. One son, Ahmed, has found a second career leading metaphysical tours of Egypt. In a bizarre twist of fate, Ahmed is now the Egyptian representative of the Edgar Cayce Foundation, which first brought Lehner to Egypt—so, ironically, the Egyptian and the American stand on opposite sides of the great Sphinx debate.

Ahmed seemed eager to make peace between Lehner and the Atlanteans. "People ask me, 'Why is Mark Lehner

DIVORCE SALE
KOREN

against us?' I say, 'Because he has to be.' "

"Why?" Lehner asked.

"Because you can't be part of the scientific community and support the Atlantis theory," Ahmed replied.

"That's the wrong answer," Lehner said. "If the evidence indicated that there was a Hall of Records underneath the Sphinx, I would still be looking for it. Let me ask you a question. If there was Atlantis and all these people in 10,000 B.C., where are their books? Where is their pottery? Where are their tombs? Where are their hieroglyphs? Just show me just one thing. One thing. Why is that not a big problem for people who believe in Atlantis? We have thousands of tombs, thousands of hieroglyphs. If I climb the Pyramid with you, I can show you pottery in the mortar between the stones. We have carbon-dated it. What more do we need? You work with these people. You lecture to them. Why do people need to believe in myths? Why can't they believe in Khufu and Khafre? It's a great civilization."

"People like change, they like to believe in fantasy," Ahmed said.

"So you don't believe in the Atlantis myth?" Lehner asked.

"I need evidence and there is no evidence," Ahmed replied. "So what can I say? But these people, that's what they want to hear. . . . I really do not believe in Atlantis, I just want you to know that. To be honest with you, this is part of my job. If I don't say these things, they will go away."

We ran into Ahmed the next day, over in the parking lot of a nearby hotel, standing next to the enormous air-conditioned red bus he uses for his metaphysical tours. He was wearing a beaded necklace with a round, pitted silver object on it that looked like something you would use to steep tea in. "It's an amulet this group I am taking around wears," Ahmed explained. "Everyone in the group has to wear it for protection before they can enter the Great Pyramid. We are about to go in and do three hours' meditating and chanting in the King's Chamber." New Age groups pay extra money to be alone in the Pyramids during hours when they are normally closed.

Lehner asked one of Ahmed's group, a woman from North Carolina, where she had got her amulet.

"Judy made them herself and consecrated them in temple," she said, as if people on every continent knew Judy.

"What does your tour of Egypt consist of?" I asked.

"Well, our group, we're working on the body," she said. "So it starts with the feet in Abu Simbel"—one of the southernmost points in Egypt—"and then we go up the body in Luxor. Now we're at the top of Egypt, the Great Pyramid, working on the head. It's all about awakening cellular memory in the different parts of your body. Like, there's this other group that takes people into the King's Chamber of the Pyramid and they lie each person in the sarcophagus and tell them their 'real name,' and it awakes their cellular memory."

After the woman got on the bus, Lehner asked Ahmed how much the group was paying to use the Pyramid after hours. "Two thousand Egyptian pounds"—about seven hundred dollars—"for the first twenty people," Ahmed said. Although Zahi Hawass does not like having people visit the tombs, it is impossible for him to pass up that kind of money. Every person entering the Pyramid that evening would be paying a hundred Egyptian pounds, thirty-three dollars—the monthly salary of a young archeologist working for the Supreme Council of Egyptian Antiquities.

Ahmed explained that one member of his group was ready to contribute a hundred thousand dollars to search for the Hall of Records of Atlantis. In fact, most of the high technology brought to Giza during the last thirty years has been used either for high-profile treasure hunting or for the New Age search for lost civilizations. In the nineteen-sixties, the Nobel Prize winner Luis Alvarez, of the University of California at Berkeley, used the measurement of cosmic rays to look for hidden chambers in the Great Pyramid, and found nothing. The French conducted a similar search using radar, with the same result. Last year, another Frenchman was allowed to do a pollution study inside the Great Pyramid, but Hawass found out that he was drilling into the Pyramid walls looking for the mummy of Khufu.

"All these people, they are working for their glory only, glory by advertising their discoveries, and they are not involved in the conservation," Hawass said. "We do not even have an archeological map of Egypt. We do not need more excavations—we need to preserve what we have. I took a photograph of the scenes in the temple of Edfu five years ago, and I took the same scene a year ago. This scene has lost thirty per cent in four years. Every day and every week we are losing information. We have only a hundred years and these monuments will be gone if nothing is done. We should cover all the monuments of Egypt again with sand and leave it for another generation who are smarter and sincere and not hungry for fame."

There is a poignant moment in Fellini's "Roma" in which workmen uncover a brilliant-colored ancient Roman wall painting while building a subway line, but as they stand there admiring it, the painting, exposed to the air and light for the first time in centuries, fades and vanishes before their eyes. Something similar, albeit at a slower rate, is happening to the monuments of Egypt, especially in the delicate painted tombs of the Valleys of the Kings and Queens, in Luxor.

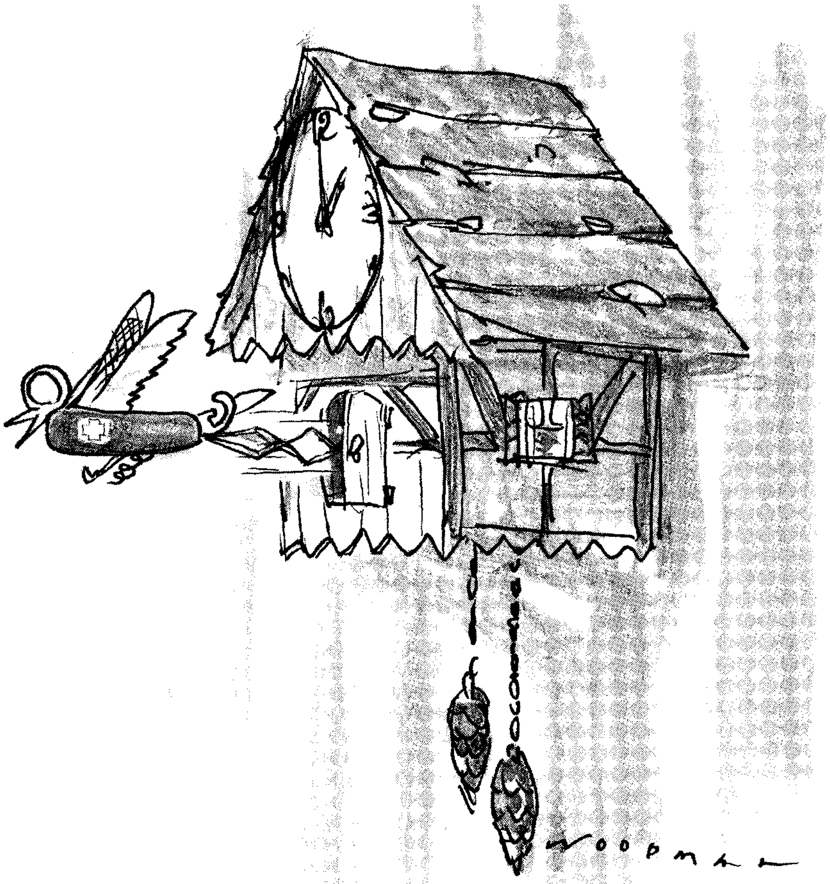
The Egyptian Pharaohs built their pyramids and tombs with the idea that no one should enter them ever again. And yet the focus of both modern Western scholarship and mass tourism is on precisely these closed, private spaces. The conservation of the past is also a peculiarly modern preoccupation, born out of a vain hope that we can freeze time and the notion that what we are trying to freeze is the past. "In antiquity, the Sphinx was painted in bright, comic-book colors," Lehner said. "It was not the solemn beige ruin we have today." What we are trying to freeze is actually the present, which offers a highly fragmentary version of the past. Our vision of the past is heavily conditioned and distorted by those monuments which happen to have survived the ravages of time. No doubt some of the other Seven Wonders of the World—such as the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Colossus of Rhodes, or the Lighthouse of Alexandria—would exert similar fascination, and perhaps even have their own New Age cults, if they were still around. So many great monuments of ancient Egypt survive in part because of historical circumstance: vast quarries of stone gave the Egyptians material for their buildings, and the desert climate preserved them. For boats, cedarwood had to be imported from Lebanon. The Phoenicians, a great seafaring civilization, used the abundant wood of their native Lebanon to explore and colonize much of the Mediterranean, but little remains of their boats or their monuments.

Similarly, the soft human tissue of ancient Egyptian society has fallen away and crumbled, leaving only its most massive structures. Trying to recover that lost social context—the world of the Pyramid and Sphinx builders—has become the focus of Lehner's work in recent years.

HERODOTUS wrote that it took some hundred thousand people to build the Great Pyramid, conjuring up images of an army of slaves laboring under the lash of the Pharaoh. But from Lehner's work and other recent excavations a very different image of life at Giza in the Old Kingdom is emerging. For several years, Lehner has been working on the excavation of an ancient bakery he discovered about three hundred yards southeast of the Sphinx. The bakery is next to a fish-processing plant, and their presence dovetails with the work Zahi Hawass has done, excavating the workmen's graveyard. In its first generations, archeology was concerned mainly with finding statues and treasures, uncovering the tombs of princes and Pharaohs; this recent work is beginning to tell us more about the ordinary ancient Egyptians.

"My interest has gone beyond the site itself to the dynamics of the society that produced the Pyramids," Lehner said as we walked over the land where his bakery has been reburied, covered over with protective sand and decorated with camel dung. "I am becoming more and more convinced that ancient Egyptian society was a series of households within households, in an embedded pattern. Rather than having a large Wonder Bread factory, they did things with a kind of single-loaf method, replicating it many, many times." He went on, "Complexity theory in the natural sciences tells us how you can create global orders out of local rules, that you can create the complexity of the human body out of DNA or the computer out of simple on-and-off electrical signals. And something similar may have happened in ancient Egypt, in which a complex, large-scale society evolved out of the simple household structure. The word 'pharaoh' in ancient Egyptian means 'the greatest household.' It seems counterintuitive at first, yet in many ways it is more logical that the modern state did not just spring full-blown from the head of Zeus but evolved gradually from the kind of patriarchal society that you find throughout the ancient Near East."

Scholars now believe that the bulk of the work on the Pyramids was done by a group of five hundred to a thousand highly trained craftsmen, who received both compensation and prestige for their efforts, and that the heavy lifting was done by a group of five thousand to seven thousand workmen, who were brought in from



different parts of the country on a rotating basis. When an American engineering company was putting in the sewer system for the village near the Sphinx, archeologists like Hawass working alongside them found what looks like a settlement that may have covered at least five hundred acres. Rather than living in large, military-style barracks, the workmen of Giza appear to have lived in small mud-brick houses. They also appear to have enjoyed the same kind of individual burial at Giza as the priests and members of the royal household who are buried right around the Pyramids.

Many of the workmen's tombs that Hawass's men have uncovered look a lot like the much grander burial places of the nobles but in miniature. "There are little beehivelike domes that look like pyramids, little rectangular tombs, little mastabas, and little false doors as in a doll's house," Lehner explained. "They look a lot like the things you find in the tombs at Giza, but they are on a small scale and they are made in mud brick rather than stone. A lot of Egyptologists use the word 'state,' as if the Pharaoh and his administration were on one side and the people on the other. We always thought that all we had was 'royal court' culture and that this was different from the popular culture of ancient Egypt. But what we are finding increasingly is that they are all part of the same culture."

Traditional Egyptology, and not just the New Age cult, has suffered, according to Lehner, from seeing Egyptian monuments in isolation, as merely the products of an all-powerful Pharaoh. "The great Wizard of Oz is not only all the wacko ideas of a lost civilization and outer-space people, even for many Egyptologists and scholars—it's the notion of the barracks, a huge conscripted workforce, slaves," he told me. Lehner has begun to see the monuments less as the product of the whim of an absolute ruler than of the collective will of a new urban society. "The 'man behind the curtain,' " he said, extending his "Wizard of Oz" metaphor, "is the idea that these sublime structures were raised with a household mode of production."

What is gradually emerging is that Giza was not just a religious center but a city. "If there were twenty thousand or thirty thousand people living here, it would have been a supercity for the third millennium B.C.," Lehner said. As he uncovers new things, he is plugging all the information into a large computer database, which he and his colleagues at the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute are using to create a new digitalized three-dimensional model not just of the Sphinx but of the entire Giza Plateau.

Naturally, much of the ancient city Lehner describes is no longer visible. Since the sewage system at Nazlet-el-Saman was finished, the workmen's settlement has been asphalted over. The Valley Temple of Khufu, also found during the sewer project, is now covered by the median of the main street. "See—right in front of where that fat man is walking was a row of houses," Lehner pointed out. "Underneath that carriage is a house, and where that road is there was a causeway." A modern cemetery, which has grown as rapidly as the town itself, covers most of the area where digs done at the beginning of the century had uncovered a series of streets and houses lived in by the priests who tended the cult of the Pyramids.

Other sites that were excavated but left unprotected have simply deteriorated beyond recognition. The Valley Temple of the third Pyramid, which was built hastily after the Pharaoh's death, has eroded and been sanded over, as have dozens of houses of the Pyramid city that were not eaten up by the graveyard. "We have photographs from the nineteen-thirties that show walls as high as two metres," Lehner said as we stood on what looked like barren ground. "Now all that is left of them are mud-brick stains on the desert sand." It was simply not the practice of archeologists to rebury and conserve a site after they had extracted what they were looking for. "Without these petrified remains of the soft tissue of society, these monuments look mysterious," Lehner said. "If you don't see their mud-brick houses and tombs, any great monument like the Great Pyramid looks like it was built by space people or a vast military organization. If you don't see the context, you don't see them as human monuments. That's the importance of finding bakeries and houses."

Ironically, the Pharaohs may have actually achieved what they hoped for. "The ancient Egyptians didn't want them to be human monuments," Lehner repeated. "They covered them with casements, stones that were smoothed. They wanted to create something ethereal and cosmic. But behind the casement their work was much sloppier, and you can see the living hand." ♦

SHOWCASE BY BRUCE WEBER

THE TWO TONYS

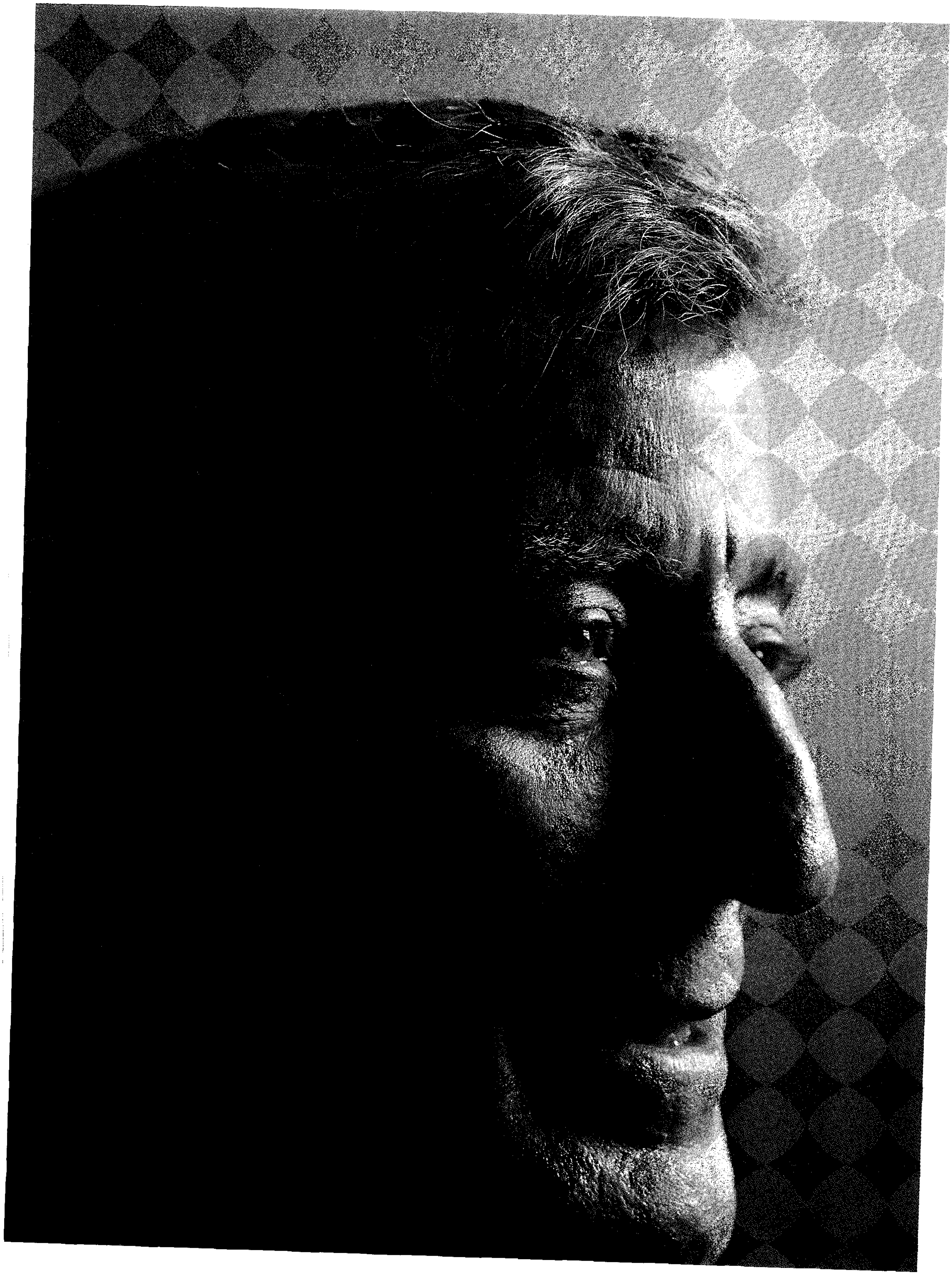
THERE are two Tony Bennetts—the masterly singer and Benedetto the Sunday painter. But Benedetto has suddenly begun to elbow Bennett. "Rizzoli put out a little book of my paintings for Christmas called 'What My Heart Has Seen,' " Bennett said last week. "I had a whole warehouse of paintings, and it took eight months to put the book together. It did so well my paintings have been flying off the wall. I usually do about a hundred pictures a year, but now I'm painting all the time. I looked back the other day—I turned seventy last year—and I saw I'd been doing two hundred singing dates a year for forty years. So I'd like to take time off just to paint. What happened was I ran into an old schoolmate, the portrait painter Everett Raymond Kinstler, and we've become really close. He's been knocking my ears back about painting the right way, and recently he's encouraged me to go into watercolors—in Winslow Homer's style."

Then Bennett talked about his new Billie Holiday CD, "Tony Bennett on Holiday," and about the Billie Holiday concerts he's giving in Carnegie Hall on February 18th and 19th. "At first, I thought, Wait a minute, what am I getting into, trying to sing Billie's songs? But the album came off quite honest and natural. I just sing my style, because I remembered what Lester Young had told a drummer who copied Jo Jones: 'You sound like Lady Jo, but if that's all you want you'll only be a member of the chorus.' "

Bennett said that he had done a gig the night before for the Red Cross at The Breakers in Palm Beach, and that he'd been staying at Mar-a-Lago, the mansion that Marjorie Merriweather Post built in the twenties. "Donald Trump bought it and made it into a private club," Bennett said. "It costs a hundred thousand to join and ten thousand a year after that. But he's made me a permanent member—as artist-in-residence."

—WHITNEY BALLIETT

Tony Bennett in New York, December, 1996.



FICTION

BIG BUCKS

BY WILLIAM TREVOR

FILIP PAGOWSKI

waited on the pier, watching the four men dragging the boat on the shingle. She watched while the catch was landed and some damage to the nets examined. At the top of the steps that brought them near to where she stood the men parted and she went to John Michael.

“Your mother,” Fina said, and she watched him guessing that his mother was dead now. “I’m sorry, John Michael,” she said. “I’m sorry.”

He nodded, silent, as she knew he would be. It was cold and darkening as they walked together to the cottage where his mother was. Gray on gray, swiftly blown clouds threatened rain. He’ll go now, Fina’s thought was. He’ll go from me.

“Father Clery was there at the end,” she said.

“HAVE you plans?” John Michael’s uncle—his mother’s brother—inquired after the funeral. Plans were necessary: John Michael’s father had drowned when John Michael was an infant, his fisherman’s cottage then becoming his widow’s by right for her lifetime. In a different arrangement—John Michael being a fisherman himself—a cottage would become his in time, but not yet, he being the youngest, the only young one among older men.

“I’ll go,” he said in reply to his uncle’s question.

“You might want to.”

“I’ll go, all right.”

Fina heard that said, the confirmation given that John Michael had been waiting only for the death. He had explained to her a while ago that that was how it would be, touching on the subject, not making much of it in the circumstances. His arm held out, Bat Quinn used to point over the sea to the horizon beyond the two rocks that were islands in the bay. “Big bucks,” he used to say, and name the men of his own generation who had gone after them: Donoghue and Artie Corrigan and Meagher and Flynn, and Big Reilly and Matt Cready. There were others who’d gone inland or to England, but they hadn’t done as well.

“A thing I’ll put to you,” John Michael’s uncle was saying now, “is the consideration of the farm.”

“The farm?”

“When I’m buried myself.”

“What about the farm?”

“I’m saying it’ll be left.”

Still listening, Fina heard a statement made through what was being left out: the farm would pass to John Michael, since there was no one else to inherit it.

“I get a tiredness those days,” John Michael’s uncle said. His wasted features and old man’s bloodshot eyes confirmed this revelation. Two years ago he’d been widowed; after a childless marriage he was alone.

“There’s a while in you yet,” John Michael said.

“I can’t manage the acres.”

They could be on the farm, Fina found herself thinking; she and John Michael could pull the place together. Inland from the sea, where the air was softer and you didn’t live in fear of what the sea would take from you, they could make a life there. The heart had gone from the old man, but he wasn’t difficult. He wouldn’t be a burden in the time that was left to him.

“Ah, no, no.” John Michael shook his head, his rejection not acknowledging in any other way what was being offered. The slender hope, a brief illumination in Fina’s thoughts, was quenched. That evening John Michael said he had the fare saved.

THE plans that could not be made in the lifetime of John Michael’s mother were made now. John Michael would go soon. In May he would return for the wedding, and take Fina back with him. He didn’t know what work he’d get, but according to Bat Quinn it had never mattered to the men who’d gone before him that fishing was what they knew. “Leave it open till you get there, boy,” Bat Quinn advised, the same advice he’d been giving for forty years. Matt Cready came back once, the only one who did, his big bucks spent like pennies every night in the bar of the half-and-half. “Look at that, boy,” Bat Quinn invited, displaying for John Michael the dollar bill he kept in a drawer. Bat Quinn had a niece who was a nun in Delaware, and a sister in Chicago until her death two years before.

“It’ll still be there,” Fina said. “If things don’t work out, John Michael, there’ll be your uncle’s farm.”

John Michael didn’t say anything, which for Fina was as good as his dismissing the suggestion. They knew one another well, had gone together to school, picked up on the pier every morning by the bus, the only two from the village at that time. Concerned about the adventure that was being embarked upon, Fina’s father said they were still no more than children. “Oh, John Michael’ll fall on his feet,” her mother predicted, fond of John Michael, optimistic on his behalf. The family kept the half-and-half—grocery and public house—all three of them serving there. “Isn’t he welcome to move in with us?” Fina’s father had offered when John Michael’s mother died, and Fina passed that on, knowing that—as with the farm or the fishing—John Michael wouldn’t even consider it. Sometimes when Bat Quinn was slouched heavily at the bar, his great paunch straining his clothes and his small eyes watery from drink, she hated him.

“Sure, I have to go,” John Michael said.

It was what they had talked about and agreed. Yet still, and often, Fina found herself thinking about the farm, not that she had ever been there. A few miles from the town of Kinard—which had a minimarket, a draper’s, five public houses, a hardware, Power’s Medical Hall, and a Subaru dealer—the farmhouse was remote, built without foundations, according to John Michael. Slated and whitewashed, it was solitary where it stood except for the yard sheds, its four fields stretching out behind it, as far as the boglands that began with the slope of the mountain. The mountain had no name, John Michael said, or if it had it was forgotten now, and there wasn't a gate that swung. Old bedsteads blocked the holes in the hedges, there was a taste of turf on the water you drank. Damp brought on mildew in the rooms.

"I have to go," John Michael said again, and Fina could feel him thinking what alternative was there except the sea or to struggle with the rocks on those few acres of bog pasture, or to be beholden in the half-and-half. Her own two brothers had gone, one to Dublin, the other to England. One or the other of them would have had the inheritance of the half-and-half but both had turned their backs on it. The seashore village was drained of its young, more now than ever it had been.

"It's only we wouldn't know. We wouldn't know what it'll be like." Fina turned to him, saying that, one evening at twilight on the strand. Physically, there was a similarity about them, both of them slightly made, John Michael hardly a head taller. Both were dark-haired, with a modesty in their features, as there was in their manner. They seemed more vulnerable when they were together than when they were on their own.

"Amn't I going there to see, though, Fina?"

Her hand was warm in his, and his felt strong, although she knew it wasn't particularly. Since they were children they had belonged to one another, and when first he said he intended to go to America she wanted to go, too, in order still to be with him. On this same strand two years ago, and in the twilight of an evening also, they spoke of love.

"I only want to be with you," she said now.

"Sure, it's the same for me."

HE was gone, quite suddenly. For two hundred and one days they would be parted; already Fina had counted them. She thought at first he'd come back, that at the last moment before he left Ireland he'd change his mind, not wanting to be parted, not wanting to leave so much that was familiar. But that day passed, and when it was the evening of the next one Bat Quinn was talking about big bucks again, his small eyes squinting at her from the red fat of his face. Only Jamesie O'Connor was ever sent back, he said, on account of his dead leg. "Don't worry, girl," Bat Quinn consoled, and began about the schooner that was pitched up on the rocks when he was five years old, twelve foreign men taken in for burial. "Sure, what's here for John Michael, only the like of that? And isn't he safe with the mighty dollar to watch over him?" Bat Quinn had more talk in him than anyone who ever came into the half-and-half. If exile or shipwrecks weren't his subject it would be the Corpus Christi he walked to in his childhood, twenty-three miles to Kinard, twenty-three miles back again, or how an old priest used to bless the hurley sticks of the team he favored, or the firing of Lisreagh House. He'd been a fisherman himself, going out with the boats for more than fifty years. He'd never worn a collar or tie in his life, he shaved himself once a week and had never had the need of a wife; he washed his clothes when they required it. All that Bat Quinn would tell you, having told you most of it before. He had stayed at home when the others went, but even so he insisted that Boston's long, straight streets were a wonder when the evening sun shone down them. You'd go into McDaid's and there was shamrock in pots and a photo of Christy Ring. He had it as a fact that Donoghue got to be a candy king before he went to his grave in a green-upholstered coffin. Artie Corrigan made his stack in the wheat fields of Kansas. Big Reilly rose high in the Frisco police force and ran it in the end.

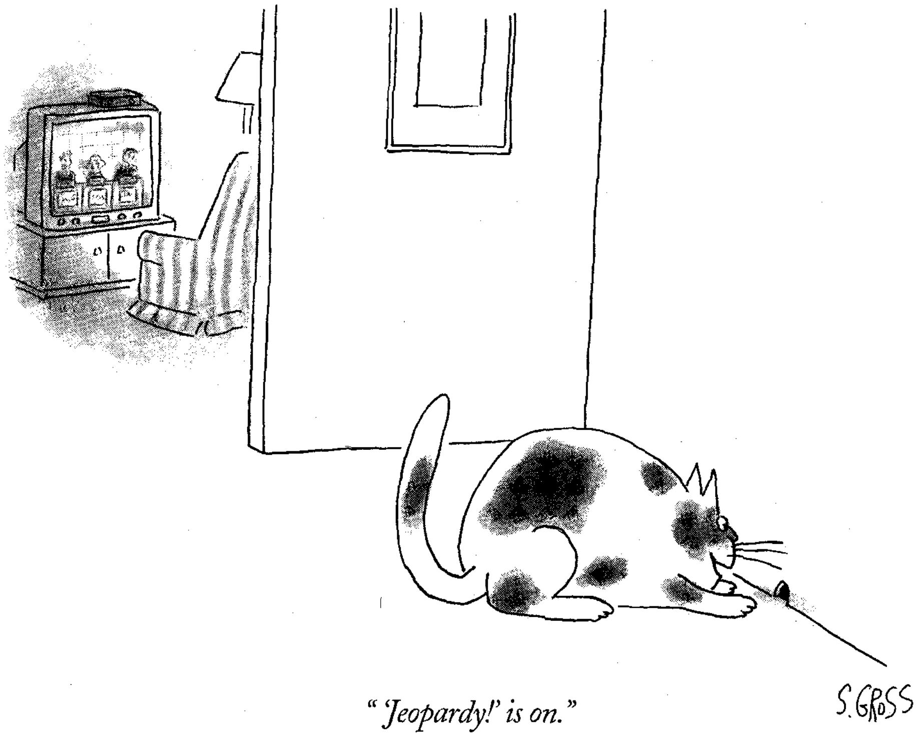
"I missed you the minute I left," John Michael wrote. There was a lot to tell her, his first letter went on, but even so it was short. He wasn't used to writing letters, he said before he went away; he'd do his best. "I have work with a gang," he wrote when three weeks had gone by, and unable to help herself Fina thought of gangsters. She laughed, as though John Michael were there to laugh with her.

"There were tourists here last week," Fina wrote herself. "Italian people who asked Mary Doleen would there be fish today. They came into the shop and we thought they were German but they said Italian. They'd be back for fish in the morning, they said, but they never came. Bat Quinn was on the pier waiting, wanting to know was it Rome they were from. There were never Italians here before, he said, the time of the wreck it was Spaniards washed up. He was down on the pier the next few mornings, but they never came back."

John Michael replied directly to that, saying he was working with an Italian but he didn't know his name. It was laboring work, he said. "Give him time, girl," Bat Quinn advised, but when more weeks went by there was no mention of the streets of Boston or the Kansas wheatlands. Then a letter came that asked Fina not to write because there wouldn't be an address to write to for a while. John Michael said he'd let her know when he had one again.

In this way Fina and John Michael began to lose touch. You had to lodge where you could, John Michael had explained; you wouldn't earn a penny if you paid regular rent. Fina didn't entirely understand this. She couldn't see that you could lodge anywhere without paying rent, and it was too late now to ask. John Michael had to take what he could get, she of course could see that. He had to move about if it was the only way; if he said so it must be right.

A cold, sunny November began, but the pattern of the days themselves didn't change much. Fina served in the shop, slicing rashers on the machine, adding up bills, unpacking the items that were delivered—the jams and meat pastes and tinned goods, the porridge meal and dried goods, the baking ingredients in their bulky cartons. O'Brien's bread van brought the bread from Kinard on Tuesdays and Fridays, milk came on alternate days, and there was the longlife if it was held up, which sometimes it was. Experience had taught the family of the half-and-half the business, what to order and when, what to keep in stock both in the shop and in the bar. You could be caught out if you didn't know what you were doing, Fina's mother used to say; you could have stuff on the shelves for a generation or find yourself running out because you hadn't looked ahead. Her mother ran the shop and took a rest in the evenings when the men came into the bar and Fina's father was in charge. Her mother was as lightly made as she was, small and busy, with a certain knowledge of where everything was on the crowded shelves



"'Jeopardy!' is on."

of the grocery, quick with figures, spectacles suspended on a chain. Fina's father—assisted in the bar by Fina, as her mother was in the shop—was a big man, slow of movement and thought, silver-haired, always in his shirtsleeves, the sleeves themselves rolled up. He put on a black suit to go to Mass, and a tie with a tiepin, and wore a hat for the walk through the village. Fina's mother dressed herself carefully also, in a coat and hat that were not otherwise worn. The three of them went together on Sundays and separately at other times, to confession or confraternity.

John Michael didn't write when he had no address, and Fina fell back on her imagination. The world of America, which she and John Michael had talked about and wondered about for so long, was spiced with the yarns of Bat Quinn, his exaggeration and fantasy steadied by facts remembered from the days when Mr. Horan unrolled the map of the continent and hung it on the blackboard. On the glossy surface the states were shown in shades of brown and green and yellow, the Great Lakes blue. Iron came from Minnesota and Michigan and Pennsylvania, uranium from Colorado. Cotton and tobacco belonged to the South.

The tip of Mr. Horan's cane moved in a straight line, horizontally, up and down, dividing Nebraska from South Dakota, Oregon from Idaho. It rapped the dates of admission to the Union, it traced the course of the long Mississippi, it touched the Rockies. You listened because you had to, stifling yawns of tedium, thankfully forgetting what the Louisiana Purchase was. The scissor-tailed flycatcher was the state bird of Oklahoma, the peony was the flower of Indiana. It was in Milwaukee that Donoghue became a candy king.

The splintered schoolroom cane picking out the facts had failed to create much of a reality. Bat Quinn's second-hand information didn't inspire Fina as it did John Michael. But America lived for both of them on the screen high up above the bar of the half-and-half or the one in John Michael's kitchen. For two years before she died, his mother had to be helped to go to bed, and as often as she could Fina assisted. Afterward she sat with John Michael in the kitchen, with tea and pink Mikado biscuits and the sound turned low. They watched America, they heard its voices. Its ballgame heroes battled, rigid in their padding and their helmets. Steam swirled above the nighttime gratings of its city streets. Legs wide, eyes dead, gangsters splayed their fingers on precinct walls.

Fina liked it when the doormen greeted the yellow cabs, and the quick talk in the skyscraper lifts, and Christmas in the stores. She liked the lone driver on the highway, music on his radio, the wayside gas station he drew up at, its attendant swatting flies. She liked the boy who drilled for oil too near the old-time ranch, everything changing because the gush of oil was what mattered now, the boy in the end a big-time millionaire. College days, Thanksgiving, Robert E. Lee: she liked all that. "You want to?" John Michael would whisper, and Fina always nodded, not realizing that she did so because it was safe to agree while his mother was alive. The day his mother died everything was different.

"I got work in a laundry," the next letter said, slow in coming. Bat Quinn wagged his head in admiration when he heard. There were big bucks in the laundry business, no doubt about it. The President's shirts would have to go to a laundry, and Bat Quinn twisted round on his barstool, exclaiming loudly that John Michael Gallagher was in charge of the shirts of the President of the United States. "I'll tell you a thing, girl, you hit it lucky with John Michael Gallagher."

Fina put all that in a letter, making a joke of it, as they would have in the past. It was a long letter, with bits of news saved up from the period when they'd been out of touch.

O'Brien's bread van breaking down, the boats unable to go out for four days, the widow dancing at Martin Shaul's wake. She wondered if John Michael had an accent now, like Bat Quinn said Matt Cready acquired.

A Christmas card came in January and a fortnight later a letter with an address, 2A Beaver Street, a room that was big enough for both of them. "I painted it out," John Michael wrote. "I cleaned the windows." Ninety-one days had passed and the ones that were passing now had begun to lengthen. In Kinard a week ago Fina had chosen the material for her dress. She kept telling herself it wouldn't be all that long before the first banns were called.

The morning the letter about the room came there was an iciness in the air when she walked on the strand, thinking about the banns and thinking about Beaver Street. She imagined a fire escape zigzagging on an outside wall, a big metal structure she had seen in a film, windows opening on to it. She imagined a poor neighborhood, because that was what John Michael could afford, spindly trees struggling to grow along a sidewalk. She wouldn't object to a poor neighborhood; she knew he'd done his best.

Yet in spite of the good news the letter brought, Fina was aware of anxiety. It was there mysteriously, bewilderingly, without a reason she could put her finger on, an anxiety more intense than the worry she'd experienced when she had lain awake so often during the time they were out of touch. In that darkness she had tried to keep John Michael vivid in her thoughts, seeing him as best she could—at the work he had, in places he did not describe—but always she ended up seeing him as she knew him, as he had been, three months ago. Once upon a time, so the story was told in the village, a woman had gone after the man she loved, had walked all the way inland to Athlone: Fina would have done that, too.

The strand was empty that morning. The fishing boats were still out, there had been no one on the pier when she went by it. New shells were embedded in the clean, damp sand where she walked, washed by the waves that lapped softly over them. When she'd lain awake this same sea had seemed like a monster, without mercy in the separation it imposed, its snaps of white treacherousness, its winter blue a mockery. It owned you, as it owned the two rocky islands of its bay and the fishermen it took to itself. Its nature called the tune as it confined you. Yet for Fina this morning it seemed like a protection.

SHE knew when her father called her it would be John Michael. She had heard the ringing of the telephone above the clatter of voices in the bar, and her father's surprise when he responded. "Well, b'the holy farmer! How are you at all?" She pushed the glass she'd just filled across the counter. "Wait'll I get Fina for you," she heard her father say, and when she picked the receiver up his voice was there at once.

"Hullo, Fina."

He did not sound distant, only unusual, because in all the time of their friendship they had never spoken on the telephone to one another.

"John Michael!"

"Did you get my letter, Fina? About the room?"

"I got it yesterday."

"Are you O.K., Fina?"

"Oh, I am, I am. Are you, yourself?" She was nervous, shy with John Michael, the first time she'd ever been.

"I'm good, Fina. I'm fixed in the laundry."

"It's great to hear you."

There wouldn't be telephone calls, he'd said before he went, and she'd agreed: telephone calls would eat up what he earned. But hearing his voice now she kept closing her eyes with delight and gratitude. The euphoria she'd experienced when she read the letter, the euphoria that had slipped away when she was walking on the strand, was there again.

"Listen, Fina, there's a thing we have to think about. A difficulty about May, Fina."

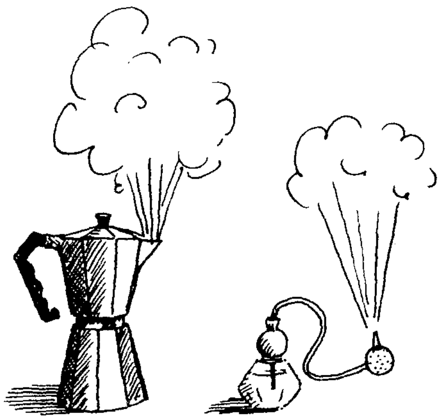
"Difficulty?"

"About coming back."

He paused again, and then he had to repeat some of what he said because she couldn't follow it. It was why he had phoned. Because he knew it would sound complicated, but actually it wasn't: it was best he didn't come back in May. It was best because once you'd got to where he was now, once you'd got into steady work, it wasn't easy to come and go, it wasn't easy to pass through the immigration authorities. He was still a visitor, he said; he mentioned a work permit. Like hawks, he said they were.

"You understand, Fina?"

She shook her head in the darkened shop, where the telephone was. There was a smell of bacon, and of stout and spirits drifting in from the other side of the half-and-half. The deep freeze began to sound, registering its periodic intake of electricity. "Chef Soups," a point-of-sale inducement read, close enough to discern, the rest of its message lost in the gloom.



"If I was to come over I wouldn't get back in again."

It would be better to be married in America. It would be better if she came over and he stayed where he was. He asked her if she understood, and she felt as if she were stumbling about, in some kind of a dream without sense in it. All she'd ever wanted was to be married to him. So often she had said it and she said it now, again.

"I know we planned it different, Fina. I know, I know. Only this thing has to be said."

"It's all right."

"Look after yourself, Fina."

"I think of you all the time. I love you."

"I think of you, too. I love you, too."

There was the click of the receiver replaced. And Fina wondered where he was, in what kind of room, and if he was still standing, as she was, beside the telephone. Once there had been voices in the background. It would be half past four, still daylight there, and she wondered if he was at work in the laundry and if he'd taken a risk, using the phone like that. Everything would be different if he'd asked how the wedding dress was getting along, if he'd said to make sure the banns were called in time.

"How's John Michael Gallagher?" Bat Quinn asked, slouched in his corner, on the stool that over the years had become his own. In the dimly illuminated bar the expression on his face was as lost as the words on the Chef point-of-sale had been, but Fina could guess at what was there—the small eyes would be reflecting his excitement because all those miles away John Michael Gallagher had touched success.

"He's doing well, girl. Isn't it grand for the pair of ye?"

"Yes, it is."

"You're troubled, though."

"No, I'm O.K."

"He had to go, girl. They have to go."

"You didn't yourself."

"Ah, no, no."

By the door of the bar there was a game of twenty-one. The men John Michael had fished with were silent, as they often were. Fina's father washed glasses at the sink.

"I don't know what'll happen now." Fina said that to Bat Quinn before she said it to her mother or her father. She moved closer to him, a man she'd never cared for, drawn to him because he knew that uncertainty was the price you paid, that there would always be anxiety. Success was a hole-in-corner existence, an illegal presence that would one day be forgiven if you were lucky. In the room with the clean windows and the freshly painted walls she would wait every evening, and you could say it would be the same as waiting for the boats to come back, or like waiting in the kitchen of the farm for the day's work to be done. Only it wouldn't be; it would be different altogether and this was the beginning of it.

"He can't come back for the wedding."

"It's understandable."

The dark liquid in the glass was drained away, the glass edged toward her on the scrubbed surface of the bar, coins counted out, the exact amount. She would have been strengthened by the wedding, by Father Clery's words and the glamour of her dress, reality suspended. She refilled the glass and scooped up the money.

"I was frightened when he got the room," she said, "even though we love one another."

"WILL they take it back?" Fina's mother wondered about the wedding-dress material. All but the yard she had begun to cut the arms out of was untouched. Scally wouldn't return the full price because what was left would have to be sold as a remnant. You couldn't expect the full price from a draper like Scally, but an agreement might be reached to make up for the disappointment. Fina's mother had sat for a while not saying anything when she heard the news, and then she sighed and cheered up, for that was her way. She'd assumed at first that she'd finish the dress anyway, that Fina would need it when she married John Michael in America. But Fina explained it wouldn't be that kind of wedding now.

"They gave an amnesty a while back," Fina's father said. "There was talk about it." He remembered a figure, something like a hundred and twenty thousand Irish immigrants outside the system in New York; it was understandable that something had to be done. "John Michael has the size of it, all right," he said.

It had never been easy. Not since the Famine years, the first great exodus from the land, the ships called coffin ships. Chance had always played a part: in the journey, in what was there after it. There was always uncertainty, always misfortune and desperation and failure. You knew where you were if you stayed, you knew the worst before it happened.

"See how things are with him in May," Fina's father advised. "Wedding or not, wait till May before you'd set out on your travels."

Fina nodded, not saying anything, and that same week she went out to the farm. She took the Kinard bus and walked the last two miles from where it dropped her off. Sheepdogs barked when she turned in to the yard, but the barking was ignored by John Michael's uncle, as if it didn't matter to him that someone had come, as if all curiosity about visitors had long ago expired. Grass grew through the cobbles, a solitary hen pecked at the edge of a dung pile.

"I was wondering how you were," Fina said in the kitchen, and the haggard countenance that the farm had defeated was lifted from a perusal of *Ireland's Own*. Boiled potatoes had been tumbled out onto a newspaper, the skins of those eaten in a pile, peas left in a tin. A plate with a knife and fork on it was pushed to one side.

"Sit down, Fina," the old man invited. "Wait till I make a cup of tea."

Life seemed to return to him while he half filled a kettle and put it on a ring of his electric stove. He spooned tea into an unheated pot and set out cups and saucers, and milk in a milking can. He offered bread but Fina shook her head. He took a heel of butter from a safe on the dresser.

"John Michael went over," he said.

"Yes, he did. A while back."

"He's settled so."

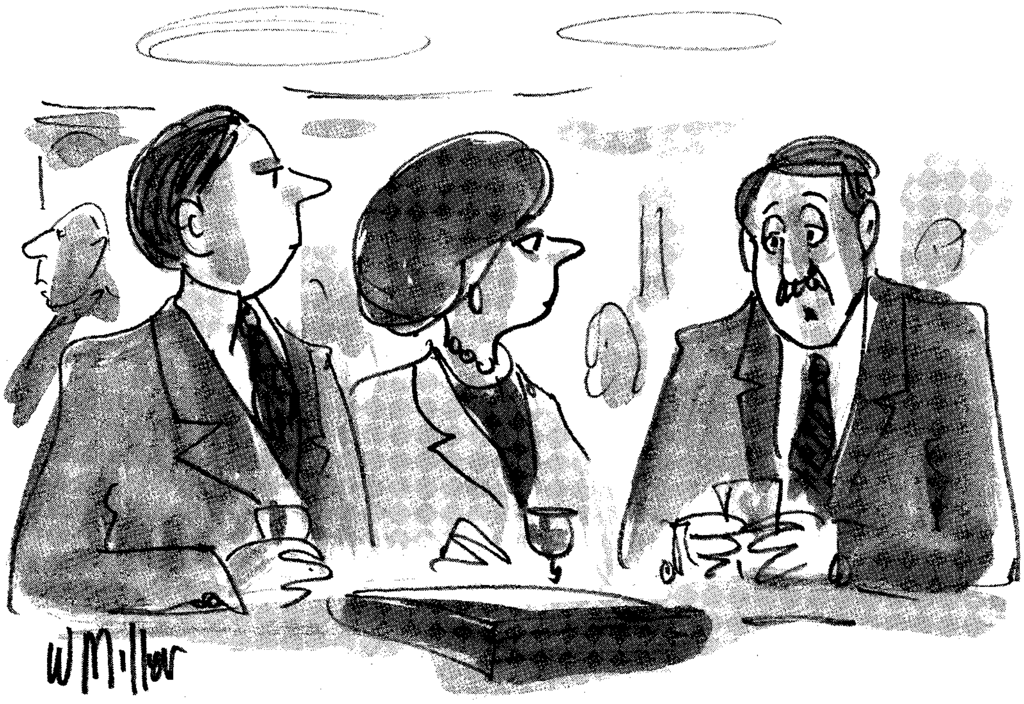
But even as he spoke there was a flicker of expectation, a conjecture that brightened his eyes and his voice: she was surely here because it hadn't worked out, because John Michael was coming back?

"He hasn't the right papers," Fina said. She wanted the hope to remain there between them, more real because someone else shared it with her, a warmth in the chill. "He could be caught."

She watched while butter was spread on a slice of bread, and sugar sprinkled over it. It wouldn't take long to set the kitchen to rights. It wouldn't take long to paint over the dingy ceiling, to take up the linoleum from the floor and burn it, to wash every cup and knife and fork, to scrub the grease from the wooden tabletop, to fix the taps that were hanging forward from the wall, to replace the filthy armchair.

"You were never here before," the old man said, and led her upstairs to dank bedrooms, an image of Our Lady on the wall opposite each bed. A forgotten cat rushed from a windowsill. Electric wire hung crookedly from a fallen-in ceiling, mold was gray on the faded flowers of wallpaper. Downstairs, ivy crept over panes of glass.

"A digger would take out those rocks," Fina wrote that evening. "It's easier nowadays, with diggers." Nothing would come of this, she knew; yet she had to make this one last plea, and she made it sound like that, plead-

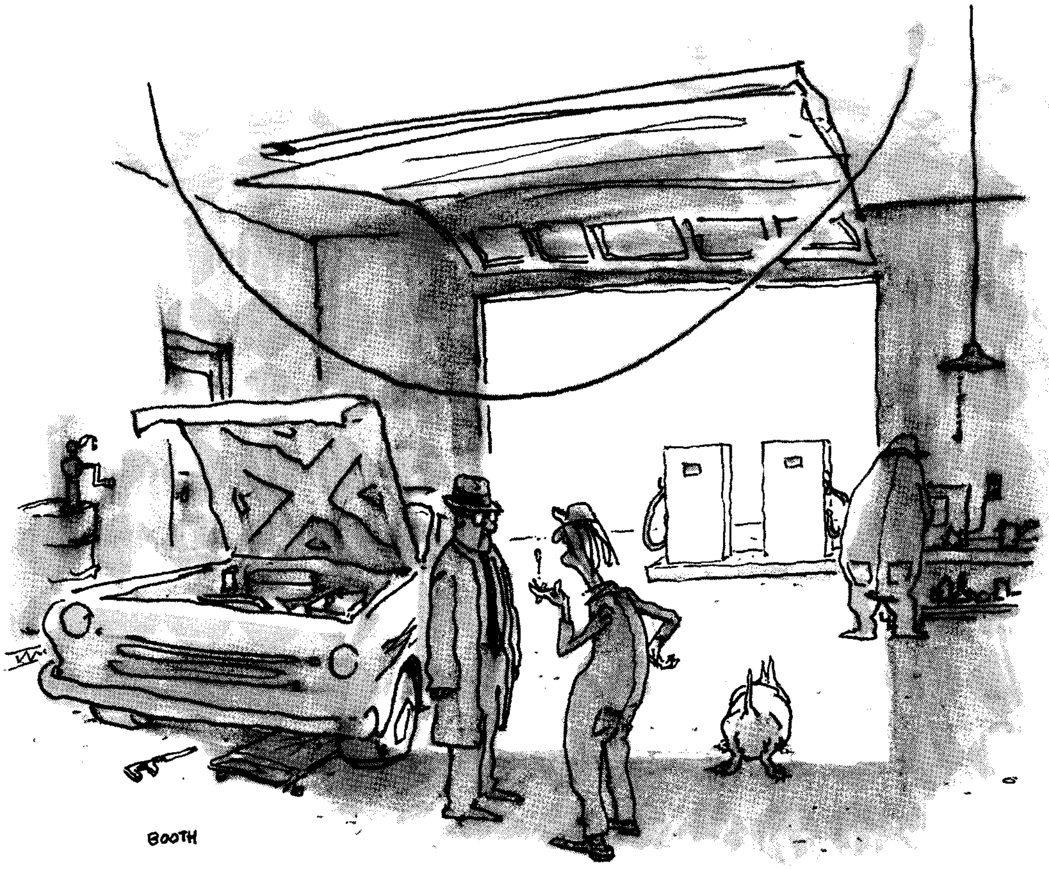


"So far, I've been a survivor, but, of course, I used to think I would be a prevailer."

ing, as she had not in the past. She described what was there, even though John Michael knew. Every detail she could remember she described, and how the changes could so easily be made, how the sun had come out when she walked back to where O'Brien's van picked her up. She knew she was writing lines to be read between, her way of saying what she'd been afraid to say before.

Nearly a month went by before John Michael's next letter came. It was short, as usual. It said he was earning more in the laundry because he didn't mind working the extra hours they asked him to. It mentioned friends he had made. It didn't refer to the farm or anything she'd written about it.

"I can't come in May," Fina wrote then. "I'm sorry, John Michael."



"Wendel found an Israeli tomato stuck in your front water hose."

• •

THE pain lasted for the empty months that followed, and for all the summer. Now and again Fina found herself thinking that one day she'd walk back from the strand and John Michael would be there, sent home because he'd broken the law or, like Jamesie O'Connor, because he wasn't fit, but the thought lasted only a few seconds, and in time it ceased to occur. June, July, and August went by; September was balmy, thirty days of a clear blue sky, the days gently dwindling. In October a year had passed since the death of John Michael's mother, since first Fina thought John Michael would go from her. By October his letters didn't come anymore.

"I'd say he'd come back in the time ahead," Bat Quinn said on a night his intake had exceeded what he allowed himself. He squinted up at her, bleariness confusing his expression. He hadn't gone himself because he didn't possess the courage, either; Fina knew that now. Urging others to go was the next best thing for Bat Quinn, and she wondered if in his urging there was revenge of a kind, too complicated to understand. The sister who'd gone from him had been restless, so it was said in the village talk, a woman who'd feared the weight of the future with a bachelor brother. In Chicago she married a tea importer. When she died, Bat Quinn hadn't known for seven months.

"I'd say he'd come back, all right," Bat Quinn repeated, and he added, as if the two observations somehow belonged together, "Haven't you the delicate way with you, pouring that stout, girl?"

"Oh, I have, all right."

It was likely enough that in the time ahead, when he'd made his money, John Michael would return, to look about him and remember. In the time ahead he would see her as she was, having inherited what her brothers hadn't wanted to inherit. It wouldn't matter to him that the inland farm had died when the old man died, for in the circumstances why should it? Close to one another, she and John Michael had sometimes hardly seemed two different people. Apart, they were aware of the insistence that they were.

"The way things are," Bat Quinn said, heaving himself off his stool to lead the exodus from the bar, which over the years had become his privilege, the nightly assistance he offered in the half-and-half. "Good night to you so, girl."

She was better at pouring the stout than her father was, even though he'd been at it longer. She had the delicacy of the young, her hands still steady, not yet roughened. In the seashore village she was young among the old, but she would not be that when John Michael returned.

"Good night, Fina," the men called out, one after another before they left, and when the last of them had gone she bolted the door and urged her father to go upstairs to bed. She cleared up the glasses and knocked the contents of the ashtrays into a bowl. She wondered if they were sorry for her, Bat Quinn and the men John Michael had fished with, her mother and her father. Did they think of her as trapped among them, thrown there by the tide of circumstances, unhappily alone?

They could not know she did not experience regret. They could not know she had come to realize she was less alone than if she were with John Michael now. The long companionship, their future planned, their passion and their embraces were marked in memory with a poignancy from which the sting was drawn; fear was not always bad. He would come back and they would walk again on the strand, neither of them mentioning the fragility of love, or that destruction had been averted when they were young. ♦

THE ART WORLD

DE KOONING AS MELODRAMA

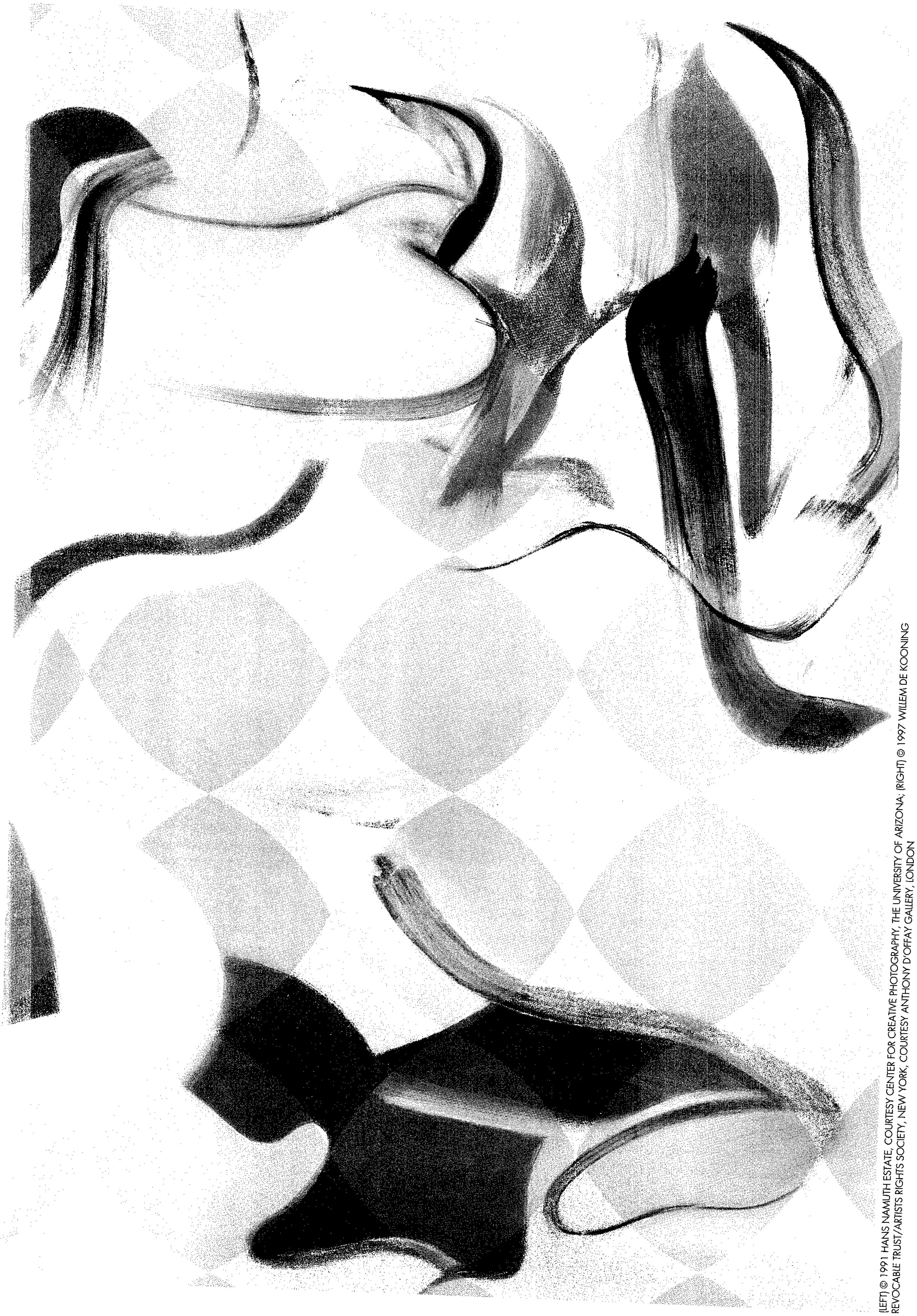
What do the late paintings really reveal?

BY CALVIN TOMKINS

“ART never seems to make me peaceful or pure,” Willem de Kooning said in 1951. “I always seem to be wrapped in the melodrama of vulgarity.” This was *not* a complaint. Melodrama and vulgarity were perfectly acceptable elements in painting and in life, as far as he was concerned, and he welcomed them both, although never in the unmodulated form that his statement suggests. De Kooning, who is generally regarded as our greatest living artist, will be ninety-three in April. Virtually immobilized by Alzheimer’s disease, he has not painted since 1990, and he is presumably unaware of the continuing melodrama that surrounds the paintings he did from 1981 to 1989, forty of which recently went on view at the Museum of Modern Art (through April 29th), in an exhibition called “Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings, the 1980s.”

Organized jointly by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, where it opened, in October, 1995, and the Walker Art Center, in Minneapolis, the exhibition has also appeared at museums in Bonn and Rotterdam, and controversy has attended it at every venue. There appears to be little common ground between those who see the paintings in question as a sublime achievement, a late style comparable to the cut-paper masterpieces of the aging Matisse, and those who describe them as the senile doodlings of a once great artist whose reputation is being damaged for the sake of commercial exploitation. The polemics on both sides make the paintings themselves somewhat hard to see. We tend to scan them for clues to the artist’s mental condition, and to make medical judgments that are even more fatuous than the usual art-critical bushwa. What we are dealing with here, at any rate, is a substantial body of work

Above: De Kooning, photographed by Hans Namuth in 1983. Right: “Untitled V” (1983).



(LEFT) © 1991 HANS NAMUTH ESTATE, COURTESY CENTER FOR CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY, THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA; (RIGHT) © 1997 WILLEM DE KOONING REVOCABLE TRUST/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY, NEW YORK, COURTESY ANTHONY D'OFFAY GALLERY, LONDON

(more than three hundred paintings), in a style that departs radically from anything the artist had done before; and posterity, in deciding how to evaluate it, is clearly going to have its hands full.

The wonder is that these paintings exist at all. By 1978, after twenty-five years of heavy drinking, de Kooning was an alcoholic wreck. Although he managed, in spite of weeklong binges and subsequent blackouts, to paint some impressive pictures—the turbulent "abstract landscapes" of those years—his health was breaking down by perceptible degrees. At this point, Elaine de Kooning, to whom he was still married, even though they had separated in 1955, reëntered and took charge of his life. She moved into a house near the combined house-and-studio that he had built for himself in East Hampton, scared him into therapy and Alcoholics Anonymous, and hired studio assistants who would help him stay sober. The alcohol-withdrawal process lasted nearly two years, during which he hardly painted at all, but it worked.

Early in 1981, he began painting regularly again, in a very different style. The lush, densely painted impastos of the nineteen-seventies abstractions are gone; instead, the paint in these new canvases is scraped down and sometimes rubbed with sandpaper, yielding a flat surface with large areas of white in which underlying colors appear and disappear. The range of color is restricted to the primaries (red, yellow, blue), with occasional touches of complementary orange, green, and violet. Compared with his seventies pictures, which pull the viewer right into a vortex of agitated and highly physical activity, the new work exists in a separate space, a more contemplative arena with less drama and cleaner air.

Over the next few years, de Kooning's production increased at an amazing rate. The artist, whose difficulty in finishing a painting was legendary—he is said to have repainted the famous "Woman I" literally hundreds of times before it finally left his studio, in 1952—was now turning out a new canvas every week. Although photographic records made by his studio assistants show that many of the eighties paintings were reworked a dozen times or more, it was obvious that de Kooning had adopted new work habits as well as a new style. According to Tom Ferrara, one of his two main assistants, de Kooning had "made a conscious decision to be less self-critical, to err on the side of underworking rather than overworking." As Ferrara went on to explain, "He was trying to simplify, to concentrate on something he was best at, which is drawing. . . . He knew his days were dwindling, and he was propelled. He was not struggling. He wasn't trying to prove anything. . . . He just breathed them out."

The paintings became less and less crowded, the fluid, undulating forms more clearly defined. There were no preliminary drawings for them. De Kooning, one of the century's preëminent draftsmen, would now start by sketching a few abstract forms directly on the canvas with charcoal (the forms themselves were usually borrowed from his earlier paintings), and he would then proceed to paint in and around them, reworking them as he went along. The integration of painting and drawing, which is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the eighties pictures, may have its roots in the black-and-white abstractions that de Kooning did in the nineteen-forties, as a number of critics have pointed out. Its effect, however, is quite different: the late paintings have an airy lightness and a lyricism for which there is no precedent in a half century of the artist's work.

THE new work habits and the new style, coupled with what we now know about the artist's mental decline during these years, have proved deeply troubling to some of de Kooning's admirers. Ever since the first showing of the eighties paintings, at the Xavier Fourcade gallery in 1982, rumblings of discontent have been heard. De Kooning's increasing isolation from the outside world—engineered largely by Elaine de Kooning and Fourcade, both of whom felt that his salvation lay in a regimen of daily activity in the studio—had the unfortunate effect of feeding the rumor mill that exists for all great artists. His assistants, it was said, were doing the paintings for him. The whole operation was a cynical plot to cash in on a reputation. The old man had lost it, and he was being shamefully used.

Robert Storr, the Museum of Modern Art curator who installed the show here, addresses these troublesome issues directly in a fascinating essay in the exhibition catalogue. There is no doubt that de Kooning was suffering from short-term memory loss (complicated by alcohol abuse) before 1980. As his condition slowly deteriorated during the next ten years, his studio assistants took over more and more of the preparatory work on the paintings. They would block out the abstract forms with charcoal (by 1985, the forms themselves were being projected on the canvas from slides of earlier de Kooning paintings or drawings), and they would sometimes even lay in the first coat of white paint in the spaces between the lines. Around 1985 or 1986, Elaine de Kooning told the assistants to add more colors to the artist's limited palette. At no time, however, did de Kooning cede control over his creative process. The assistants all swear to that, and videotapes of the artist at work attest to it. There is also the visual evidence: the kinetic flow and energy of the

IN THE CITY OF WHAT ONCE WAS

In the city of what once was, my brother tamed Sundays,
and when he no longer could, when he no longer could,
he'd gouge the shadows from the walls
with the quicks of his nails.
In the city of what once was, I repaired clocks,
and high in the tower I set the heavy iron hand
to the fragile hours.
You would pick wild strawberries from the lip of the abyss.

A word, and we came crashing down.

—Liliana Ursu

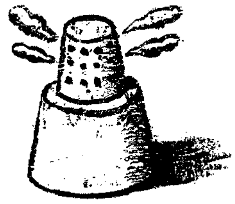
(*Translated, from the Romanian, by Tess Gallagher and Adam J. Sorkin.*)

forms, the reminiscences of female anatomy in abstract space, the sense of light reflected off water and playing over landscape—these and other indications of the old de Kooning mastery would be very hard to fake.

But how can a man who is losing his mind continue to make significant art? On this issue, the medical authorities Storr cites are as divided as the art critics. Some say that Alzheimer's affects all areas of mental capacity, others that it attacks them selectively. Storr quotes Oliver Sacks, who has studied and written extensively about neurological dysfunction, and has said that he has personally witnessed "all sorts of skills (including artistic ones) preserved or largely preserved, even in advanced stages of dementing diseases such as Alzheimer's." Sacks goes on to say, " 'Style,' neurologically, is the deepest part of one's being, and may be preserved, almost to the last, in a dementia." De Kooning could not sign his name after 1986, but he continued to paint for three more years. In Robert Storr's opinion, the real cutoff point came toward the end of 1987, when "his pace slackened definitively and his work, despite extraordinary passages, lost its overall structural coherence."

As I walked through the beautifully installed exhibition at MOMA, where these uniformly large paintings are given plenty of wall space, my own inclination was to move the cutoff date back a couple of years. The show is hung chronologically, and the pictures in the last room, from 1987, do not have anything like the authority of the earlier ones. Far from charting a gradual decline in the artist's powers, though, this exhibition is a series of peaks and valleys. Some of the 1982 pictures have a tentative, unfinished look, while other, later ones seem fully resolved and pulsing with energy. The 1982 "Untitled V," with its rushing cataracts of white and its elongated, twisting black forms, has a muscular thrust and parry not repeated anywhere else in the exhibition. A 1983 picture also called "Untitled V" (most of the eighties paintings are marked either "Untitled" or "No Title," with numbers that start over again each year), in which a large yellow mass achieves an asymmetrical balance in a field of white space broken by lithe swipes of red and blue, has the serenity and assurance that Tom Ferrara was referring to when he spoke of de Kooning's just breathing them out.

As the space in the paintings became emptier, the risks increased. In 1985, de Kooning could still pull off a taut, rhythmical design by using a few intersecting ribbons of blue and black on a white ground. That same year, apparently with Matisse's Vence chapel in mind, he put together a large, three-panel work for the wall behind the altar of St. Peter's Church, in Manhattan; as it happened, the church eventually decided that abstract painting was not appropriate for the space, and returned it to the artist, but the triptych is one of the highlights of the current exhibition. It is somewhat misleading, however, to compare de Kooning's eighties paintings to the late works of Matisse. Everything that made Matisse a major artist is distilled in those cut-paper masterpieces of his final years. With de Kooning, this is simply not the case. What's missing is the melodrama of vulgarity. The messy, viscous slathers of pigment, the turbulence and turmoil, the appalling violence of the first series of "Woman" paintings, in the nineteen-fifties, and the hilarious sexiness of the second series, a decade later, the sheer velocity of a style that allowed no room for refinement or contemplation—these are essential elements of de Kooning's greatness, and they are present only in small traces, if at all, in his late work. No one but de Kooning could have done the eighties paintings, to be sure, but they lack the coarse and disturbing beauty that was at the core of his art. De Kooning used to say that he worked out of doubt. At the end, going beyond doubt, he became a different sort of artist.



It is a moving experience nevertheless to see how this cruelly afflicted man never wavered in his dedication to painting—the all-out, risk-taking kind of painting that had become for him, as he once said, "a way of living today." In a 1978 interview with de Kooning, the *Times* critic John Russell quotes him as saying, "You have to keep on the very edge of something, all the time, or the picture dies." He slipped over that edge sometime in the late nineteen-eighties. It would be reassuring to think that, in whatever strange country he now finds himself, the landscape is peaceful and pure. ♦

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BOOKS

THE FIRST LIBERAL

Gladstone and the pleasure of Victorian politics.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

In Roy Jenkins's "Gladstone" (Random House; $35), the greatest figure in nineteenth-century British history chops down a lot of trees. In fact, he's hard at work with the axe when, in 1868, he is interrupted by a telegram from the Queen, which asks him to become Prime Minister. "Very significant," he announces after reading the telegram, and he pulls back the axe again. "My mission is to pacify Ireland." Crash.

This is a famous story. Lytton Strachey alluded to it in "Eminent Victorians," but there it has the aura of a philistine, anti-romantic gesture. (The question is, which is to be master, man or nature? That's all.) Treated at full biographical length, Gladstone's tree-felling itself turns out to be a kind of romantic gesture. Both Jenkins and another new Gladstone biographer—Travis L. Crosby, in "The Two Mr. Gladstones" (Yale; $35)—reproduce many improbable photographs of Gladstone, in formal ministerial dress, striking a dignified pose against a background of bruised or fallen trees. Apparently, admirers would come to Gladstone's estate at Hawarden hoping to catch a flying chip. Americans reading about this mania may nurse a secret suspicion that the trees must have been pretty weak reeds to begin with, sawed through in advance by a second-assistant somebody. One of the photographs in Jenkins's book, though, shows Gladstone, in sideburns and suit and bow tie, patting the trunk of an oak that he has clearly just brought down. The thing looks the size of a giant sequoia, and one of his sons sits on the trunk, looking beat while his wife gazes at him in wonder.

This quality of slightly dotty romantic obsession, more Monty Python than Masterpiece Theatre, gives verve to what would otherwise be a wearyingly exemplary life. It may also help answer a question that Jenkins's biography raises for the reader: why is it so much fun to read about Victorian politics? At a time when only university presses seem able to muster up the energy for another go at Woodrow Wilson or Grover Cleveland, popular biographies of the young Disraeli or the older Gladstone turn up in the chain bookstores, while George MacDonald Fraser's wonderful Flashman novels have made the fiendishness of Palmerston and the righteousness of Russell as familiar to ordinary readers as the stern, weather-beaten face of M. The force of Victorian politics as a literary subject is most evident in the unlooked-for popular revival of Trollope's Palliser, or political, novels—a revival in which a minor classic has been promoted into a major one by the sheer force of the common reader's love. Nostalgia, of course, is the usual sniffy explanation for this enthusiasm, but nostalgia for what, exactly? For all those lost virtues that Gertrude Himmelfarb loves to catalogue? But what strikes us is the endless opportunistic pirouettes. Nostalgia for a secure class system? But we always root for the people who break it.

Part of the fun, of course, lies in the hair-raising displays of Victorian energy. Gladstone, in the midst of his political career, produced a three-volume study of Homer, two long books on Church and State, and a new translation of Horace's Odes. Just after joining Palmerston's government, he took time off to write a fifteen-thousand-word essay on Tennyson. (He admired "Idylls of the King," was dubious about "Maude.") He could even collapse energetically from insomnia, regularly falling apart, and sometimes helping himself out with the aid of—a modern note—"the Blue Pill." At times, he was so manic that some people thought he was nuts. Yet he found a way to use his manias toward a good end. He began as the priggish servant of a smug oligarchy and ended as something like the Moses of modern liberalism—the man who was first allowed to glimpse a new, permanent party of power based on an alliance of white-collar rectitude and blue-collar aspiration.

That passage was a largely unselfconscious one, moved less by hard thought than by an instinct for the dramatic. Jenkins, himself an accomplished politician (Home Secretary in two Labour Governments, a founder of the Social Democratic Party, onetime president of the European Commission), has written an exhaustive, permanent biography, whose greatest virtue is its extraordinary worldliness. Jenkins has a bred-in-the-bone sense, almost unique among political biographers, of politics as improvisation, game, and even theatre. Writing about a confrontation over port fortifications between the anti-militarist Gladstone, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, and his alarmist and Francophobe Prime Minister, Palmerston, Jenkins can elegantly lay out the procedure by which a nominal underling is able to beat his boos through the sheer power of strategic stalling. He writes of Gladstone:

> His order of proceedings for the day was to travel up from Chester, to attend the Cabinet from 3.30 to 6.00 p.m., to seek sustenance of various sorts from Lord Aberdeen, the Duke of Newcastle and Marion Summerhayes, to dine with Sidney Herbert, whose paper together with the history of Pitt's aborted plan of 1785-6 for fortifying the dockyards he had belatedly read, and then to go to bed complaining of being "much oppressed with cough and cold." The next day he consequently rose late. . . . The delaying tactics were effective.

Whereas Jenkins understands the value of a strictly superficial explanation of events, Crosby offers a psychobiography, full of "stressors" and "coping mechanisms" (i.e., problems and solutions). He has a lot to say, all of it interesting, about how a man as passionate, and even unstable, as Gladstone managed to stay a big cheese in public life for more than sixty years. Yet one comes away persuaded by the implicit case Jenkins makes that, for all Gladstone's psychological complexity, his greatest political gifts were, like Ronald Reagan's, largely physical—charismatic and oratorical. Gladstone invented a liberal style, and it attracted new values that were looking for a liberal stylist to express them.

He began conventionally. William Ewart Gladstone was the son of a Liverpool merchant who made a fortune in corn and sugar dealing. Young William, despite his undistinguished family, went to Eton and Oxford. He did brilliantly at Oxford, getting a double first, and, as newcomers will, absorbing the old values with a thoroughness that the people who held them as a birthright didn't always share. He got into Parliament in 1833, when he was only twenty-three, as an ardent, even a violent, Conservative. Macaulay, reviewing Gladstone's early, bigoted book on "State and Church," called him "the rising hope of those stern and unbending Tories."

It was a time when British politics were still limited to squabbles within an oligarchy. There were Tories, who believed in the Crown; Whigs, who believed in the landed aristocracy (they were landed aristocrats); and a very few, middle-class Radicals, who had their doubts. Queen Victoria was still a major political force, and one of the great comic themes of Jenkins's book is her skill in bedevilling her ministers. Two issues were pressing forward that threatened, in different ways, to upset that oligarchy. One was religious toleration: Should Catholics and dissenters be allowed to vote and to sit in the House of Commons? The other was free trade: Should Parliament reduce the tariffs on foreign grain which had protected British landowners for so long? These questions look to us today like a single question, to which the "liberal" response is obvious, but at the time they didn't seem so neatly joined. At first, Gladstone was opposed to breaking the monopoly of the Church of England. But he was persuaded by the great Prime Minister Robert Peel that free trade was necessary for prosperity. A few years after entering Parliament, he joined Peel's government to help bring it about.

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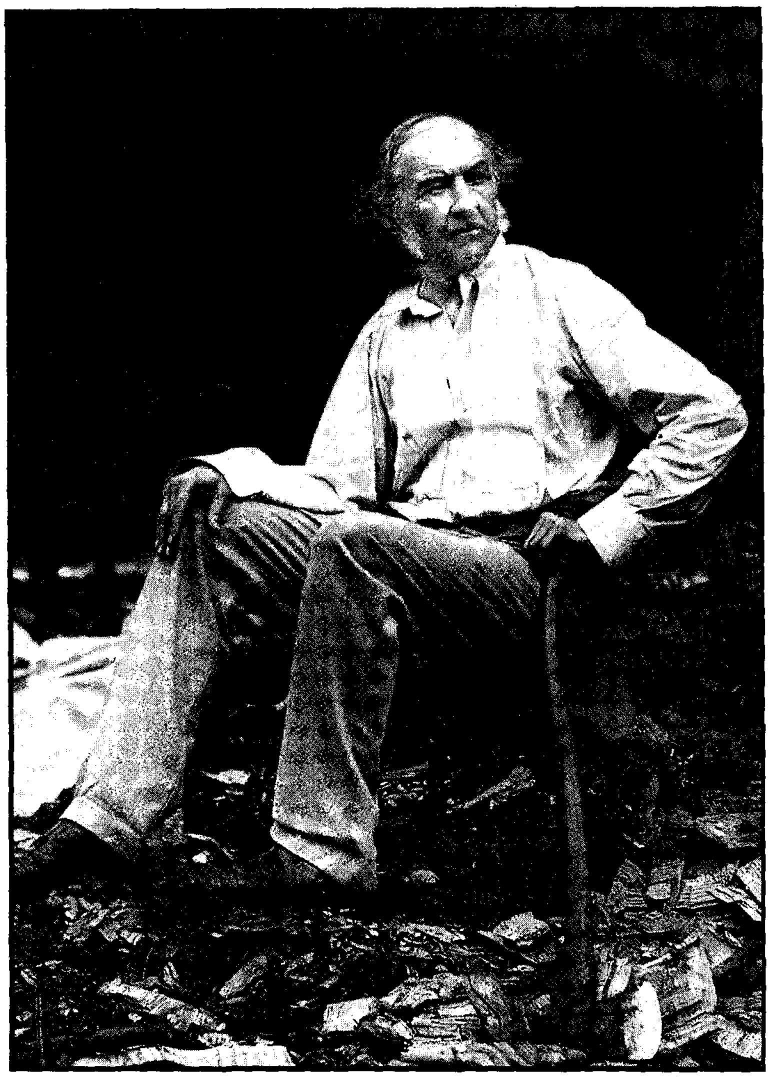
Gladstone was already an extremely exasperating man, high-handedly catechizing Peel—it's a scene worth a Max Beerbohm drawing—on all the things the government might conceivably do or not do that would force Gladstone to resign instantly, on principle. (The proposed merger of two dioceses in North Wales was one of the thorniest possibilities.) In fact, he did shortly find his way out, resigning over the "Maynooth issue," which involved subsidies to the Roman Catholic seminary near Dublin. Curiously, Gladstone ended up voting *for* the bill, and then he resigned anyway, on a principle that no one else could even identify. But being exasperating was one of the ways Gladstone kept sane: he pitched himself out of office regularly, to get in practice for the moment when life would pitch him out on its own. The arbitrary display of principle was a kind of vaccination against the bigger arbitrariness of political life.

The young politician was a reactionary and a bit of a prig. (When his soon-to-be wife, Catherine Glynne, told him the names of men who had courted her in the past, he wrote them all down in his diary in Greek characters, in a disdainful spill.) What changed him? He saw that free trade worked, and he came to accept the general breakdown of social privilege that free trade always seems to drag along behind it. He became a model of religious tolerance. And beneath the smug Tory surface—or, rather, running alongside it, in an adjacent channel—was an appetite for life.



Gladstone, "the people's William," photographed in 1877: Sweeping up prostitutes, cutting down trees, bringing down governments.

This appetite was expressed most notoriously in his desire to "rescue" prostitutes. For more than forty years, Gladstone ended his evenings in London by searching out prostitutes; he would then take them back to their rooms so that he could (at least) talk to them. He often became obsessed with them; there was an Elizabeth Collins, for instance, whom he called "beautiful beyond measure" (in his diary), and whom he saw at least seven times in a single month, once leaving a dinner with the American Ambassador to spend what he described as "two more hours, strange, questionable" with her. His defenders now and then insisted that his preoccupation was entirely innocent and virtuous, yet he was so consumed with guilt about these meetings that he flogged himself with a scourge afterward. (He flogged himself quite often, with a scourge he started using when he was tempted to read mildly salacious literature. Jenkins asks the obvious question: How *do* you flog yourself?)

Jenkins makes a subtle argument for the defense, saying that although Gladstone's appetite for the streetwalkers may have been lustful, he probably never satisfied it:

> While there was a strong beneficent aspect to his rescue work, and while his self-discipline held him back from a full use of his protégées' services, there was also (at least during his middle-life crisis) a powerful element of sexual temptation, which he found impossible to resist, about his nocturnal forays. On one occasion Gladstone referred to his "rescue" activities as "Carnal,

or the withdrawal of them would not leave such a void." On another, he described them as the "chief burden of my soul."

Whatever the truth—and Gladstone could have been just a sexual hypocrite of the kind beloved of Victorian pornography—the interesting thing is the way his genuine passion for rescuing the women ran together with a lust that he could barely articulate, forming a single, forceful stream of emotion. It was this inchoate overcharge of feeling—which swept up prostitutes, cut down trees, and brought down governments—that made Gladstone Gladstone.

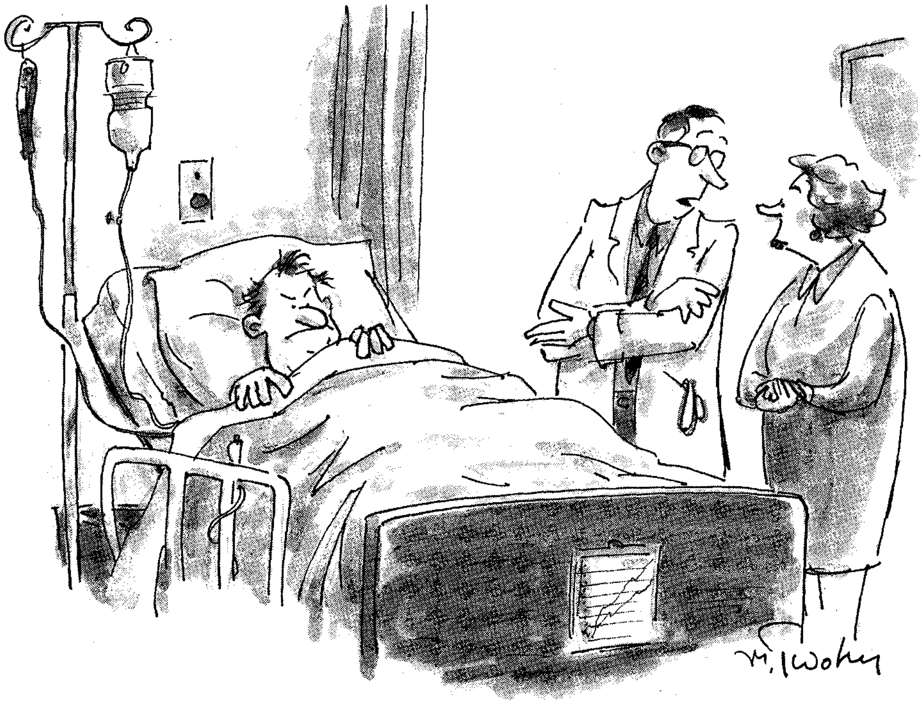
GLADSTONE did not return to government until the end of 1852, becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Aberdeen Coalition. The next year was his great year, with two commanding moments, in which he helped lay the foundation not just for his own preëminence but for modern liberalism: he introduced a budget that would replace tariffs with a more or less progressive income tax, and he addressed a vast public meeting of workingmen in Manchester.

The 1853 budget speech made Gladstone's reputation. It wasn't just the policy; it was the tone. He turned the budget from the caboose of government into its engine, creating the Robert Rubin role: the man who knows the numbers, and, knowing the numbers, cannot be moved. And his address to the workingmen in Manchester, at a time when working people still didn't have the vote, added to his reputation. Gladstone was a peculiar choice to become a popular favorite: although the tendency of his free-trade, low-tariff policy was democratic, he was never really interested in widening the electorate. But Jenkins makes a persuasive case that Gladstone's affinity for the Northern working-class audiences was moral, even "sentimental," rather than fully rational:

> There was some feeling that he was on their side, not in the sense of an economic class struggle, for he was never strong on the social condition of the people, but in the sense that he was for seriousness against cynicism, for moral purpose against frivolity, for the achievements of industrial and industrious Britain . . . and also in some sense for the solid striving of the provincial centres as against the glitter of London.

A born orator, he liked to address the masses because there were so many listeners. And, in possession of a working-class audience, he was drawn inexorably to democratic ideas. The priggish oligarch became "the People's William."

This meant that though his supremacy on the "left" of Victorian politics would not be questioned for decades, he had no seamless ideology to support his position. What took the place of a coherent, progressive philosophy was a series of passions. This was both a strength of his politics and its weakness. It meant that he could call on real popular emotion; it also meant that the four governments he formed himself, beginning in 1868—until then, he had been the most powerful commoner in a government presided over by an aristocrat, Russell or Palmerston—were put in motion, almost single-mindedly, by Gladstone's devotion to "questions": the Eastern question or the Irish question. Predictably, it was difficult to translate passion into policy. Meanwhile, other things got done, which, over time, became policy—just what we think of as liberalism.



"He's one tough cookie. I've never seen anyone bounce back from an autopsy before."

THE other great female trouble of Gladstone's life began with his ascension to government: his relations with the Queen. It's hard even for Jenkins to improve on Strachey's perfect treatment of the subject in his "Queen Victoria." Gladstone—family man, upholder of the Church of England, tree-feller—became in the Queen's eyes a dangerous radical and would-be dictator. Why this happened has long been a favorite theme of Victoriana. Strachey settled on a personal explanation: Disraeli understood the Queen as a woman; Gladstone addressed her as if she were "a public meeting," she was once said to complain. Jenkins's account leads to the inference that the conflict was a real one, rooted in policy, and that the Queen had a point: Gladstone *was* a dangerous radical. Although he was personally deferential and without a trace of obvious republican feeling, he numbered among his followers, and even in his Cabinet, several politicians—the doomed Charles Dilke was the most famous—who leaned toward republicanism. The thrust of Gladstone's policy led, inevitably, to the weakening of the power of the Queen and the old hegemony, or, as Plantagenet Palliser, Trollope's great Liberal lord, puts it, "lessening distances"—and Queens do not like diminished distances. Even as mild a figure as Charles Dodgson so mistrusted Gladstone that he created two memorable anagrams of his full name: "Wild agitator! Means well" and "Wilt tear down *all* images?"

The accounts of Gladstone and the Queen in Jenkins's book are funny, like something out of Stephen Potter. The subtlest moment of one-upmanship (Queenship, as Potter would have called it) may be Victoria's farewell to her minister when he retired, in 1894, after a lifetime of service: Mr. Gladstone, she wrote, "is right in wishing to be relieved at his age of these arduous duties, and she trusts [he will] be able to enjoy peace and quiet, with his excellent and devoted wife, in health and happiness, and that his eyesight may improve." It's the perfect sentence for retiring the butler.

GLADSTONE'S dream of Home Rule for Ireland was defeated by the Conservatives in alliance with commercial imperialists led by Joseph Chamberlain, who thought that Home Rule for the Irish would weaken the Empire. Oddly, these "radicals" in Gladstone's coalition—Chamberlain and Dilke—are, though their politics most resemble our own, the hardest to take. Their radicalism is alloyed with militarism, and looks forward to the abyss of the Great War, whereas Gladstone was one of the most reluctant military adventurers ever to run a great power: he had a healthy contempt for arms and the men who want to buy them. Speaking of the imperial war against the Zulus, he said that the Zulus had been slaughtered "for no other offence than their attempt to defend against [British] artillery with their naked bodies, their hearths and home, their wives and families."

Jenkins implies that if Gladstone had succeeded in freeing Ireland from England (and England from Ireland), modern British history might be different. The split between pro- and anti-Home Rulers in the Liberal Party might have been avoided, and it would therefore have been in a position to join with the rising force of labor to make a permanent, big-tent party—a Liberal-Labour Party, which would have been the natural party of power for most of the twentieth century. A left-centrist alliance has long been Jenkins's dream, and it is moving to see him find it foreshadowed, and foreclosed, in Gladstone's late period. Jenkins is also a passionate European, and he calls on Gladstone for support of that cause, too. Gladstone believed in "the Concert of Europe": without having a vision of European unity, much less any particular ideas about mad cows or equalization agreements, he saw Britain as a part of Europe, with the same culture, the same values, and the same problems. He was a European not by economic

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argument but by literature—a better way.

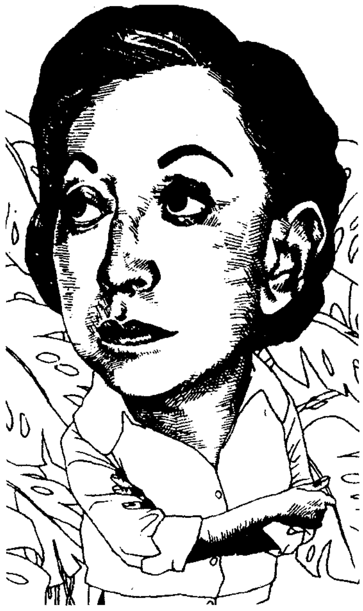
Jenkins's life of Gladstone throws at least a slanting light on a great literary creation. Gladstone, the model liberal of the nineteenth century, was, it turns out, a radical with a Whig conscience—a reformer who, in all his formal and unconscious instincts, remained full of regard and even reverence for the traditional dispensations of power. Plantagenet Palliser, the model liberal of Trollope's novels, is a Whig with a radical conscience—a born aristocrat who nonetheless understands, sorrowfully but honestly, that the system he oversees is doomed, and is even fundamentally wrong. This, it seems, was a much rarer bird, and some of Planty Pall's emotional intensity derives, one sees, from his improbability; like Hamlet, he is a projection, rather than a depiction, of a possible aristocratic type.

In Gladstone we recognize a similar emotional intensity, though in a more practical form, and we come to love it. A Liberal Party member wrote of how during one dinner Gladstone "talked about Dante, Innocent the Third, house property in London, the true theory of the Church, the enormity and monstrous absurdity of our keeping Ascension Island." The merely sentimental side of Victorian liberalism may be the most solid thing about it. ♦

TALES OF CHIAPAS

Fiction from Mexico's first feminist.

BY PETER CANBY


Rosario Castellanos

ROSARIO CASTELLANOS died in Tel Aviv in 1974, at the age of forty-nine, while serving as Mexico's Ambassador to Israel. After stepping out of a shower, she reached to switch on a light and was electrocuted. At that time, having published thirteen volumes of poetry, two highly acclaimed novels, several plays and books of short stories, and innumerable acerbic, self-critical essays, she was not only a celebrated literary figure in Mexico but also someone widely considered to be Mexico's first feminist writer; her work was "the intellectual point of departure of the women's movement," as Elena Poniatowska has put it. Yet Castellanos, for all her success, was desperately shy and chronically depressed. When she was very young, the death of her brother—her only sibling, and the family heir—threw her parents into a tailspin from which they never recovered. ("I remember an enormous and abandoned garden, some deserted corridors, some closed-off rooms. I remember the crypt—humid, dark, fragrant with flowers and wax, resonant with sobs and cries. I remember myself alone.") All but orphaned, she grew up isolated and bookish. She married late, suffered two miscarriages before giving birth to a son, and then got divorced. To this day, many people in Mexico choose to believe that her death was not an accident but a suicide.

Castellanos was always slightly out of step with Mexico's literary establishment. Possibly because she didn't write magic realism, or because the writers of "El Boom" in Latin-American fiction formed something of a men's club, she is very little known in English. Her gem of an autobiographical first novel, "The Nine Guardians" (1957), is available through Readers International, but her second novel, "Oficio de Tinieblas," published in 1962, is only now appearing here, under the title "The Book of Lamentations" (Marsilio; $24), in an excellent translation by Esther Allen. In part, this delay may be due to the peculiar challenges of translating Castellanos. Both her Spanish, which is idiosyncratic, and her subject matter are deeply rooted in Chiapas, perhaps the most Indian state in Mexico.

Until Chiapas was made famous by Subcommander Marcos and the Zapatistas, it was known mostly as a sort of Mexican Mississippi—a place where exotic and fantastically archaic social relations persisted long after they had disappeared elsewhere in the country. The Castellanos family was arguably the most prominent in the state, and when Rosario was a child its members travelled to their *finca*, near the Guatemalan border, on canopied chairs lashed to the backs of Indian serfs. "The Nine Guardians" describes the abrupt ending of this way of life. Narrated by the seven-year-old daughter of a land-owning family, it describes the loss of the family's estates to Lázaro Cárdenas's land reforms, in the late nineteen-thirties, and also the death of the young son. (These reforms exiled the Castellanos family, in greatly reduced circumstances, to Mexico City, where, as Rosario Castellanos later remarked, they settled in "on a par with the petty, very petty, bourgeoisie.")

After completing "Nine Guardians," Castellanos travelled to Madrid and studied with the Surrealist poet Vicente Aleixandre. She also read Simone Weil and Simone de Beauvoir, and under the influence of their respective philosophies eventually returned to Chiapas, cut off her hair, and spent two years travelling with a puppet theatre among the most remote highland Indian villages. This was unheard-of behavior for a Mexican woman of her background, but Castellanos had concluded that the oppression of Indians was at the dark heart of Mexican civilization; what's more, she had come to believe that it was intricately related to the sexual oppression she had experienced while she was growing up.

"Lamentations" is a fictionalized account of an 1868 uprising during which the local Maya Indians—in a quest for a deity equal to that of their foes—are alleged to have crucified an Indian boy and then laid siege to the Chiapas city of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Castellanos transposed the action in "Lamentations" to the nineteen-thirties and created an entire provincial world animated by greed, sexual predation, and racial hatred. As always, Castellanos's female characters are the most nuanced—notably Idolina, an invalid, who manipulates events from an upstairs bedroom in order to exact revenge both on the town, which she disdains, and on her philandering stepfather. Castellanos is caustic about the townspeople in general, who rally to withstand an Indian threat that is as much imagined as real: "Chests expanded in pride at having been born in this valley encircled by high mountain crests, at descending from men who were famous for their daring exploits and the purity of their names." Married women "left the bed of love and childbirth, the place where the man humiliated and exalted them, the throne of their idleness, their refuge against inclement weather, and vigorously grasped the reins of the household which they so frequently abandoned to the servants."

Half of the plot of "Lamentations," however, takes place in the nearby Indian municipality of San Juan Chamula, and here the narrative is burdened by too many references to drunkenness, the odor of closely packed bodies, the "stammer of a race that has lost its memory." Castellanos had been labelled an "indigenist," a label she resented because the typical indigenist novel romanticized Indian life and made Indians the repository of virtue. Castellanos, however, believed that Indians were no more enlightened in their behavior than non-Indians, and that their "misery has atrophied their best qualities." In making this point, she could be quite brutal. The crucifixion in the book is conducted by a childless Maya shaman—"one who knows." But the plot makes it clear that the shaman instigates the crucifixion only to consolidate her own diminishing authority. In a similar spirit, when the inevitable retaliation comes and the dazed, illiterate Maya survivors are forced to flee into the mountains for their lives, they discover in a cave (and then worship) not some long-lost hieroglyphic text but a copy of the military directives for their own repression.

All this can seem overstated—particularly in the light of recent research indicating that the crucifixion story was an invention designed to discredit the Indian cause. Yet what is most compelling about this novel—what keeps you compulsively turning the pages—is not questions of historical accuracy but the ways in which Castellanos skillfully transforms her existential despair into a dark fictional vision. Her vividly drawn characters are terminally deluded about themselves and one another. When the child is crucified in "Lamentations," it is a sacrifice without redemption. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

GUIDED TOURS OF HELL, by Francine Prose (Metropolitan; $23). In this absorbing collection of two novellas, Prose's protagonists are Americans travelling abroad. In the first, a mediocre American playwright obsessed with Kafka seeks fame in the birthplace of his idol; in the second, a self-denying writer hopes to resuscitate her lover's waning interest as they research a death tour among the catacombs and cemeteries of the City of Light. Prose's characters believe that their Europe will heal and transform them, but the author demonstrates that they feel most at home where they can live with their delusions intact.

SPORTING WITH AMARYLLIS, by Paul West (Overlook; $19.95). Spring break, London, 1626: John Milton is seventeen, and *horny*. "Samson Agonistes" is years away, and those "brothel-hearties" up at Cambridge are giving him grief for being such a nerd. Enter Amaryllis, a slutty muse who plucks young John out of his adolescent obliviousness and shows him the real goods—light S & M, a touch of coprophilia. The guys in the dorm will never believe it! And neither will we, despite West's driving, infernal prose (a "verbal kennel") and the odd thrill of watching the future epic poet and Amaryllis going at it in a eunuch-propelled gondola.

THE INVENTION THAT CHANGED THE WORLD, by Robert Buderi (Simon & Schuster; $30). From the ashes of the Second World War, there have emerged two great technological thrillers: Richard Rhodes's "The Making of the Atomic Bomb" and this book, which is a history of the development of radar. Atomic power promised to change the face of domestic life, but it was radar and the discoveries associated with it—such as microwave energy—that actually did so. Buderi is a skillful narrator and explicator of things technical. To read his book is to be reminded how extensively the energies and passions of war have been displaced into the realm of technology.

LIFE ON THE LINE, by Faye Wattleton (Ballantine; $25). This autobiography of the African-American woman who headed Planned Parenthood for fourteen years, is, for the most part, the story of her struggles against those who think governments should make decisions about human reproduction. Wattleton doesn't argue but tells and, in telling, persuades. Her narrative is heartening in that she rarely suffered from racism but is distressing in that the weapons once used by segregationists—legal flummery, unscientific "science," and violence—have been turned against women's autonomy.

THE ISLAND OF THE COLORBLIND, by Oliver Sacks (Knopf; $24). In this eccentric travelogue, the neurologist Oliver Sacks investigates Pingelap, a Pacific atoll where the incidence of total congenital color blindness is an astonishing one in twelve; he also visits Guam, where a mysterious neurodegenerative disorder has had tragic consequences for the native population. Sacks's empathy has always been uncanny, but equally remarkable is his contagious fascination with just about everything—evident here in ninety-four narrative "offshoots" that he could not bear to part with, and therefore retained as endnotes.

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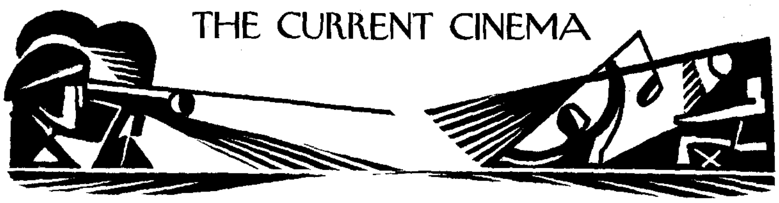


THE CURRENT CINEMA

SOCIAL STUDIES

"Nightjohn" and "Suburbia."

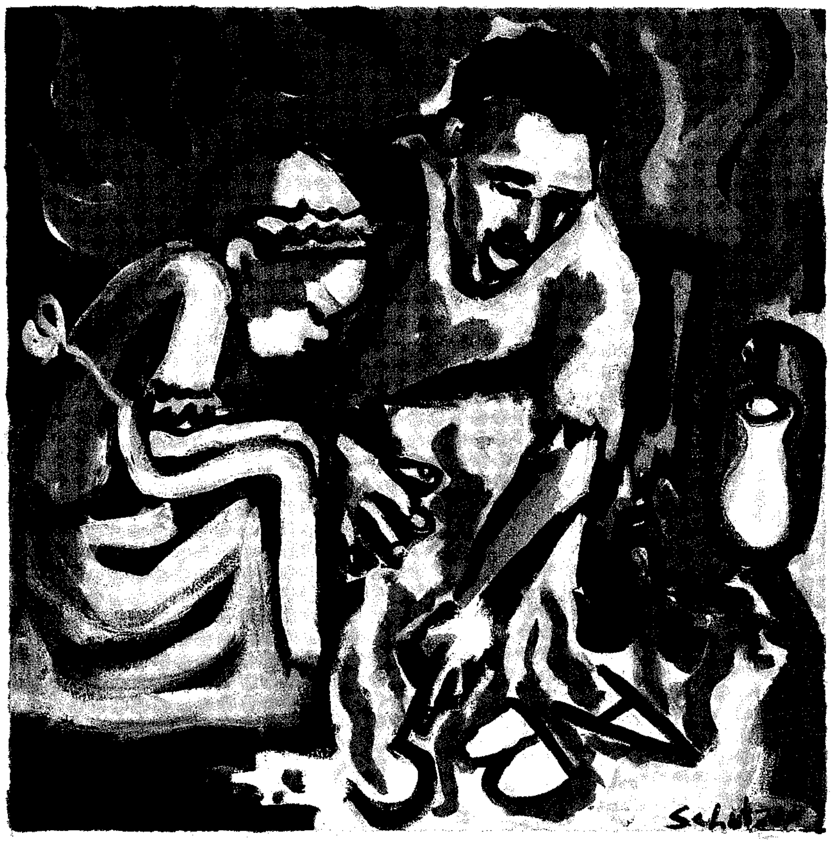
BY TERRENCE RAFFERTY

SARNY (Allison Jones), the twelve-year-old heroine and narrator of Charles Burnett's luminous "Nightjohn," is a slave on a Southern plantation, and the story she has to tell is simple and momentous: it's about how she learned to read and write. Although that may not sound terribly dramatic, the film is as tense and engrossing as a thriller about, say, the French Resistance, because Burnett so vividly evokes the danger that Sarny exposes herself to in her attempt to acquire these basic human skills. Her education is an underground activity, clandestine and nocturnal. After the long workday has ended, her tutor—a mature, well-travelled slave, whom she calls Nightjohn (Carl Lumbly)—shows her one letter at a time, tracing the designs in the dirt, so that they can be quickly erased; the slaves know only too well that their masters consider literacy a grave threat, punishable by whipping or worse. Learning has rarely seemed so risky, or so essential, as it does here. By the end of the picture, the student and her teacher have suffered the consequences of their guerrilla educational campaign, but Sarny, at least, has also derived some practical benefit from her lessons: her literacy renders her slightly less vulnerable to the wrath of her oppressors, gives her some small measure of control over her fate.

The script of "Nightjohn," by Bill Cain, is based on a young-adult novel (of the same name) by Gary Paulsen, and the message of both the book and the film is unmistakable: knowledge is power. What's remarkable about the movie's take on this after-school-special truism is that Cain and Burnett are scrupulously honest about the magnitude of the power that knowledge can confer. In the absurd and nightmarishly unjust world of the plantation, the only clear-cut victory possible for a slave is escape to the North: every other achievement, including Sarny's hard-won literacy, is no better than a relative triumph. "Nightjohn" is genuinely uplifting, but no more uplifting than the brutal facts of history will allow, and at the climax Burnett produces an extraordinarily complex emotional effect: we feel both the joy of the young heroine's accomplishment and the melancholy awareness of how awful it is that so little should seem like so much.

"Nightjohn," which was first shown last June on the Disney Channel, is currently having its theatrical première, as the centerpiece of a Burnett retrospective (running through February 13th) at the Walter Reade Theatre, in Lincoln Center. New York filmgoers—who deserve some compensation for all the hours they've wasted standing in line for and then watching the dreary cinematic products of the past year—can now see the best American movie of 1996 on a big screen, and can see it, besides, in the context of its director's brilliant but largely unknown body of work. (Non-New Yorkers are in luck, too: the Disney Channel is repeating "Nightjohn" a few times during February, and the home video was released last week.) The series includes rare screenings of Burnett's first two features, "Killer of Sheep" (1977) and "My Brother's Wedding" (1983)—both low-budget independent films that failed to get theatrical distribution in the United States and have never been released on video—in addition to the more recent and marginally less obscure "To Sleep with Anger" (1990) and "The Glass Shield" (1995). Along with a handful of short films and the documentary "America Becoming" (1991) that is Burnett's total output as a director up until "Nightjohn." His filmography, modest though it is, gives evidence of both the diversity and the consistency of a major artist. His movies resemble one another only in their common dedication to exploring the rich and frequently contradictory emotional dynamics of black Americans. Even when the action takes place entirely within the African-American community, the nuanced interactions among friends and relatives and co-workers somehow suggest each character's particular response to the conditions of the larger society.

In "Nightjohn," which is Burnett's first historical film, the director turns his scrutiny to what might be thought of as the source of his contemporary characters' sense of isolation and psychological dislocation—the "peculiar institution" of slavery—and the society he discovers here is perhaps the very image of America that the puzzled, underachieving young hero of "My Brother's Wedding" carries around in his head: a closed system that imprisons even the imagination. Burnett concentrates here, as he always does, on the details and the rhythms of a community's everyday life, and succeeds in creating one of the movies' clearest and most persuasive depictions of the nature of oppression. "Nightjohn" has its share of beatings and other acts of physical brutality, but the film's true power lies elsewhere. In the looks of fear that cross the faces of Sarny's guardian, Delie (Lorraine Toussaint), and an elderly slave called Old Man (Bill Cobbs) when they find out what Sarny and Nightjohn are up to, we feel the full, crippling effect of slavery—the thoroughness with which the system denied the humanity of black people. Burnett manages to dramatize the terror of these characters without condescending to them. Delie and Old Man are sympathetic, and, in their way, strong; it's just that everything in their experience tells them that this sort of emotional and intellectual development simply isn't a possibility for them. "Nightjohn" is too intelligent and too humane to condemn characters for the limitations of their imagination; it shows us, rather, that the deepest horror of slavery is the zeal with which these limitations are enforced.



Underground education: Allison Jones as Sarny and Carl Lumbly as her teacher in Charles Burnett's brilliant film about slavery.

And even the plantation owner, Clel Waller (Beau Bridges), isn't a one-dimensional villain. In Burnett's lucid historical vision, Clel's imagination, too, seems to have been stunted by the institution of slavery: he acts the only way he knows how to act. That doesn't excuse his inhumanity, of course; in fact, his lack of self-awareness is what makes him dangerous. The beauty of "Nightjohn" is that Burnett and his terrific actors use their own imaginations so freely and so vigorously. This picture gives you the kind of thrill that its heroine feels when the letters in the dirt start to become words: it makes a dark time legible.

IN "Suburbia" the screenwriter, Eric Bogosian, and the director, Richard Linklater, work hard at transforming Bogosian's 1994 play into something resembling a movie, and they've hit on a rather ingenious strategy: on the screen, this ensemble piece about restless youth plays as a kind of anti-"American Graffiti," with a forlorn convenience store substituted for the bright, bustling teen hangout Mel's Drive-In, and with cynicism substituted for nostalgia. The action of "Suburbia" takes place in one long night, by the end of which the young characters' lives have changed. The protagonist, a smart twenty-year-old slacker named Jeff (Giovanni Ribisi), functions as an observer of the bleak scene in his suburban town, and his friends—all former high-school classmates—are a carefully chosen array of types: Sooze (Amie Carey) is an ambitious, and pretentious, aspiring artist; Buff (Steve Zahn) is a moronic hedonist; Bee-Bee (Dina Spybey) is a quiet, fragile lost soul; Tim (Nicky Katt), who was a football star, is now a drunk with an enormous chip on his shoulder; and Pony (Jayce Bartok) is a successful pop singer, who, as he passes through his home town on a concert tour, forces his friends to reëvaluate the quality of their lives. Bogosian treats each of them contemptuously: the "artists" (including Buff, who owns a video camera) are vapid and untalented; the others are cowardly. The film's naturalistic style opens up the action without, however, expanding the writer's narrow, mean-spirited view of the characters, and without disguising the essential artificiality of the material. If anything, Linklater's attempt to film "Suburbia" realistically has the effect of emphasizing the play's most obvious flaw—that this group of "friends" consists of people who in all likelihood wouldn't have had anything to do with one another in high school. The movie drifts in some weird space between cinema and theatre, between realism and didacticism; like suburbia itself, it's deadly because it's neither here nor there. ◆

SHOUTS & MURMURS

END GAME

BY DANIEL MENAKER

If you think the approach of the year 2000 has brought no greater concern to our collective soul than trying to get a Millennium's Eve dinner reservation at Windows on the World or Spago, you haven't been paying enough attention to the great Media Unconscious. The signs are there that despite our blithe frontal-lobe plans for the occasion—midnight sex or skiing, international-date-line straddling, or having a good stiff drink at home around eleven and going to bed—we really believe that the end is nigh.

It all may have started with the terror caused by a small outbreak of bubonic plague in India a few years back. But of course one can't overlook the phenomenon a month earlier of "The Hot Zone." No, wait a minute—it was the climatologists' alarm over global warming that started the subliminal clock ticking. Actually, it must have begun with Chernobyl. Or was it the forecasts of nuclear winter? Or Rachel Carson and "Silent Spring"? Come to think of it, we've spent the entire half century working on a mass case of repressed millennial jitters, and it's getting harder and harder to ignore the symptoms.

Item: Predictions (in these pages and elsewhere) of huge meteors blasting out of the ether and destroying the planet.

Item: The frenzy of interest in Buddhism. Find oblivion before it finds you.

Item: All this crap about angels. And the movies about tornadoes, dinosaurs on the loose, volcanoes. Open your eyes, my friend.

Item: The mystery explosion in the Australian outback. Why the sudden renewal of interest? Do you have to ask?

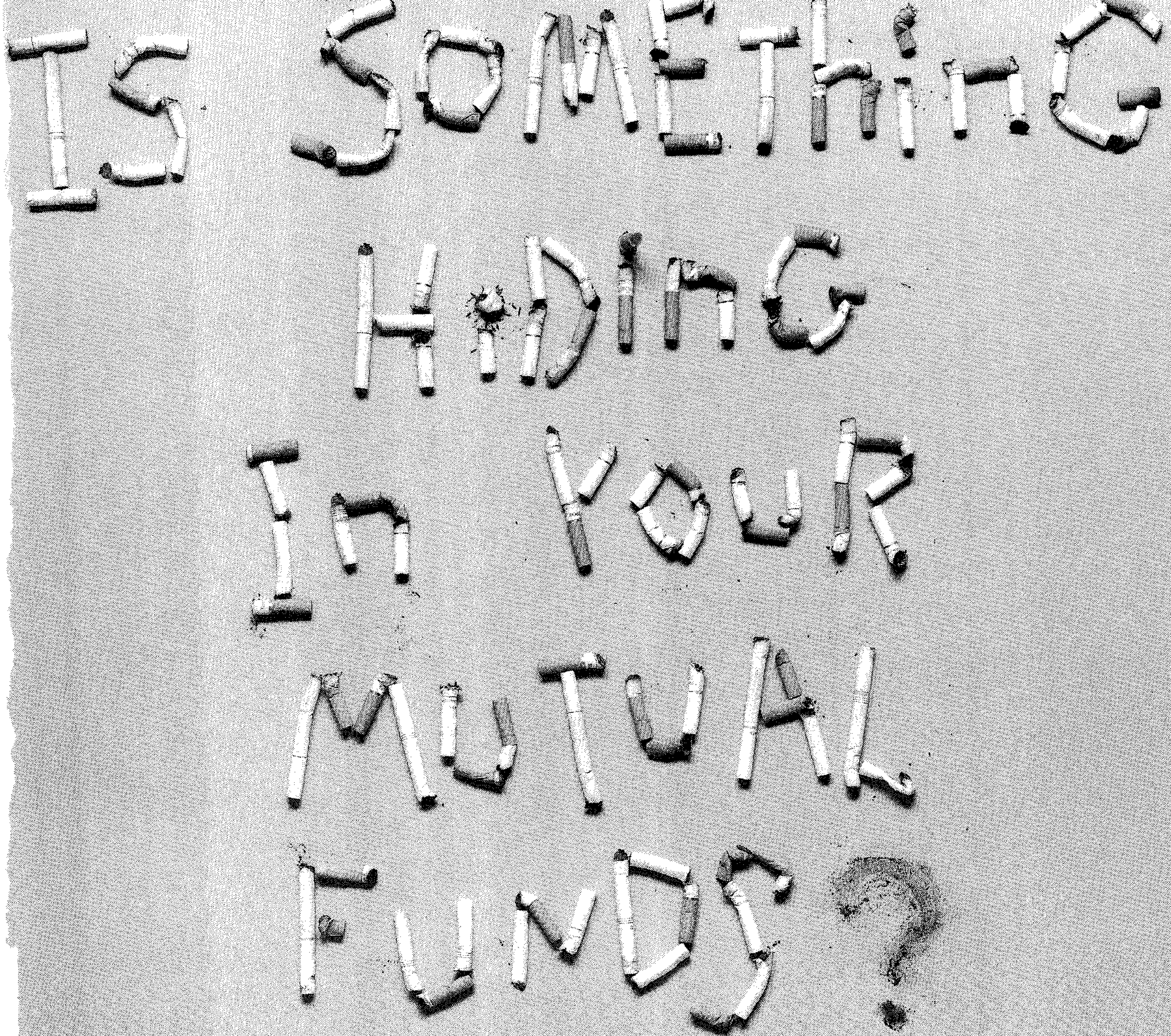
Item: The Weather Channel!

Item: O.K. You thought outer space was a vacuum, and you were right, but according to the *Times* there's now this other vacuum, a very serious mondo metavacuum coming from some random black hellhole out there, and it will destroy not only everything that exists but Every Single Thing That Ever Dreamed of Existing in a split second. How can you just stand there and ask me if I like your stupid tie?

Item: All right, stay calm. But there's these things called prions: little bits of devil protein folded up in some way that can't be undone by heat, cold, radiation, medicine, thermonuclear devices—not by anything known to man. Where did they come from? You would stop and ask a pointless, time-wasting historical question, when all that really matters is *they're here!* They get in the sheep, and then into the feed and the beef, and then they get into you, and they cause these incredible diseases that make AIDS look like a zit. They're brain diseases, you see. Not pretty at all. One of them turns you into a sort of statue—you can move only when someone throws a ball at you. I think that's what I read somewhere, but what difference does it make? As soon as you catch the ball, you freeze again. Then you fall over after a while, drool a lot, and die. More wonderful still, you know what's happening to you right until the end. Even so, when they open up your skull they find not a brain but basically Alpo. Once this plague gets going, there will be no stopping it. And, oh, P.S., it already has gotten going. Call it mad-cow disease, call it kuru, call it Creutzfeldt-Jakob, but don't bother to ask for whom this bell is tolling. I mean, I came home the other day and found an image of a Creutzfeldt-Jakob-macerated brain gracing our computer screen as a desktop pattern. My son had downloaded it from some creepy Internet source—the Doomsday Site, or the Bosch Home Page—and seeing it reminded me of those feasts in Mexico where the corpses of loved ones preside over the dinner table. Or the block parties they threw in Florence during the Black Death. And you're still thinking of going out for a bagel and some coffee? Amazing!

Item: Al Gore lindying at the Inaugural Balls.

It's easy to get caught up in this hysteria, once you're attuned to its manifestations. But I swear I'm not all that worried. And I've already got my own turn-of-the-millennium plans made. I'll be at our house in the Berkshires, enjoying a quiet family New Year's Eve. Old friends, a warm fire—that kind of thing. Plenty of canned food in the cupboards, the air purifiers set at High. The big new generator in the cellar ready to roll when—I mean if—the power goes out. I'm all set, thank you very much. ◆



There's a good chance you're investing in tobacco without even knowing it. A survey by Yankelovich Partners, Inc., found that two-thirds of investors couldn't name a single company their mutual funds were invested in. While 10 of the 15 largest mutual funds are invested in tobacco.* Do you know where your money is going? Call your financial adviser or Calvert Group at 1-800-987-2783, and find out if your mutual funds are invested in tobacco, or consult our Know What You Own service at http://www.calvertgroup.com.

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